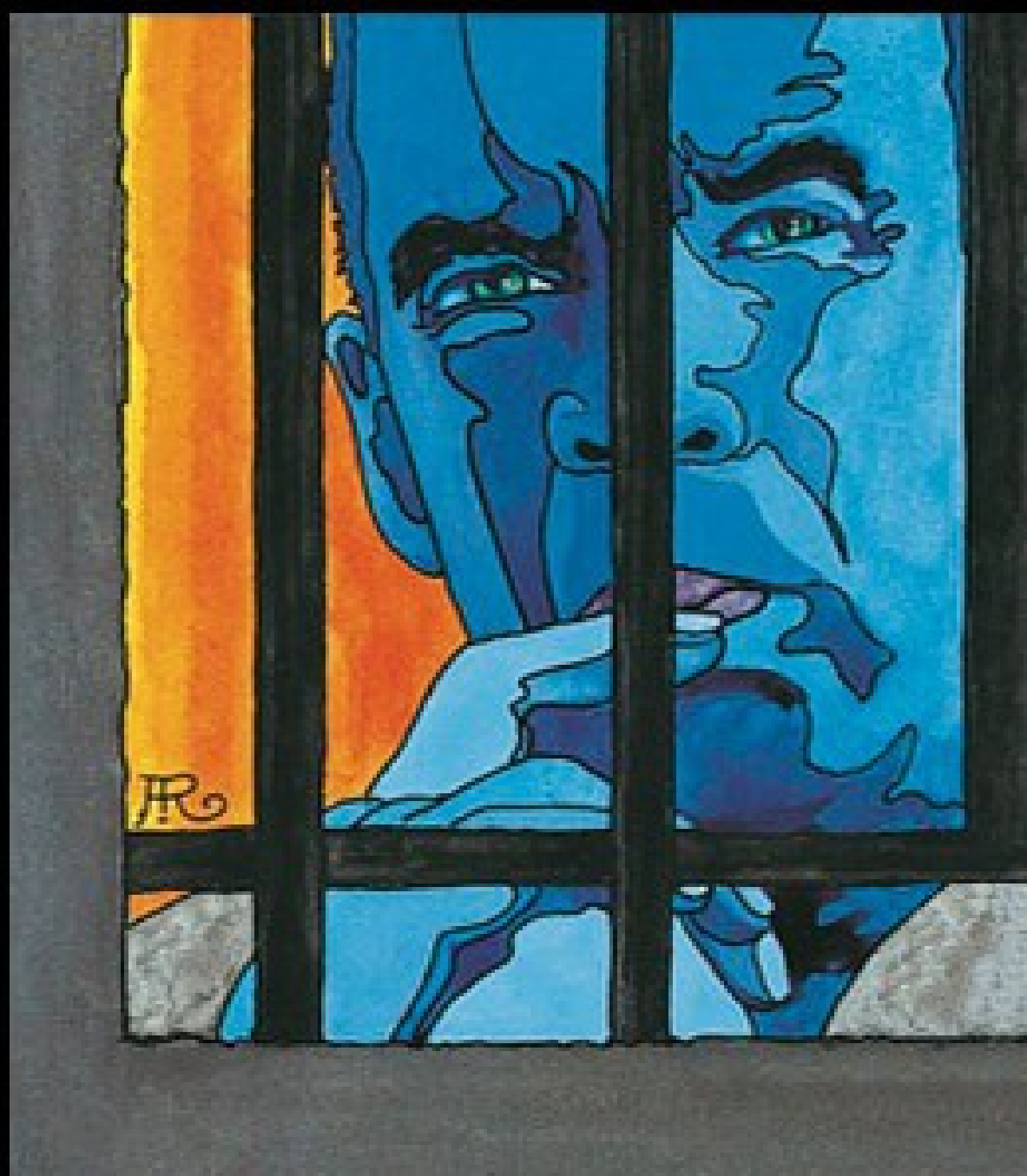


# THE INVESTIGATORS in

## THE CASE OF THE DELAYED REVENGE





in

**THE CASE  
OF THE  
DELAYED REVENGE**

Pete is kidnapped! Jupiter, Bob and Kelly proceed to search for clues. Then an anonymous letter arrives that gives a hint of an act of revenge. So this suggests a link with a past case of The Three Investigators. Jupiter immediately go through their extensive archive of case records to narrow down the list of possible perpetrators. Eventually they turn to Inspector Cotta of the Rocky Beach police for help. The inspector calls in a police psychologist who analyzes the case records and narrows the list further. But is this enough?

The Three Investigators  
in  
The Case of the Delayed Revenge

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## **1. Fear on the Neck**

The disc jockey turned up the volume to the pain threshold. The rhythm of the music increased up to the furious beat.

Pete put his glass down on the counter and nodded at Kelly. With her eyes half closed, she moved to the rhythm of the techno hit on the spot. Every now and then, she would shake her head in a forgetful way, so that her shoulder-length hair flew around her mouth and forehead. A crowd of people swayed on the dance floor. Most of them had raised their arms high up and snapped their fingers, and the multi-coloured flashes of rotating spotlights twitched across the whole dancing, singing, and howling frenzy.

“The Red Demons!” Pete yelled in Kelly’s ear.

“I know!” she yelled back. “Your favourite band!”

She slipped off the chair, took his hand and pulled him to the dance floor. To push themselves into the human tangle would have been hopeless, so they stopped at the edge.

The floor beneath them seemed to vibrate, they felt the bass rumbling all over their bodies, and their lips began to hum along with the song of the Red Demons from the blue planet Earth. Pete let himself be carried away by the racing pulse of the music. He did not even feel the elbows that a boisterous neighbour gave him.

The first time Kelly stepped on his foot, he didn’t notice. The second time, he thought it was an accident. After the third gentle kick, he opened his eyes. Kelly had stopped dancing and smilingly held her watch under her boyfriend’s nose. “Hey! Look at the time!”

Pete bent over to look at Kelly’s watch and was startled. It was almost eleven o’clock. He had promised his parents his word of honour to be home at half past eleven. After all, the few school days until the start of the holidays had to be managed with decency, and Kelly had given Mrs Crenshaw her solemn promise on the phone that Pete would not come home as late as the last two evenings. For some time now, Pete was always to be found in the new disco of Rocky Beach.

At first, he wanted to push her arm with the annoying watch aside. But then he saw the friendly, relentless look on Kelly’s face. If she put it on, he

knew there was little point in objecting. The song roared towards its end, and Pete's spirited neighbour rammed his elbow into his side one last time.

Resigned, he shrugged his shoulders. "All right!" he yelled. "The wiser man yields."

His neighbour turned to him. "Are you sure that's you?" he asked with an impertinent grin.

Pete refrained from answering. He took Kelly's hand and pulled his girlfriend behind him to the exit. They climbed up the stairs and passed two thickly padded doors before they came to the street.

Above them a huge starry sky sparkled. Pete needed some time to get used to the unreal silence. Far away the techno sound came over muffled. A motorcyclist dashed through the industrial area where the city council of Rocky Beach had approved the construction of the new music venue. It was a really big disco with all the technical razzmatazz, as Pete always emphasized when he praised the advantages of the new youth club to his friend Jupiter Jones, a disco grouch.

But the leader of The Three Investigators grimaced contemptuously on this subject and said Pete should rather read a good book. "You'll get more out of it, dear friend," he used to say, patting him on the back paternally. "At least in the long run."

Pete put his arm around Kelly and strolled with her across the street to the parking lot. She pulled out her key and unlocked the car. Pete opened the door of the old Ford and bowed, just like overzealous chauffeurs do on TV when their bosses get in or out.

From the inside, she wound down the window.

"It was a great evening," Pete said.

"It was." Her index finger touched Pete's nose. "Too bad other boys can't dance as well as you."

Stunned, he looked at her. He couldn't think of anything clever to say. "If you feel like it, we'll do it again a week from today. Okay?"

"Okay. That would be great." She drove off, and he stopped waving until she reached the exit.

As he walked over to his own car, an MG, he felt the vibration of the synth drums all over his body. He got behind the steering wheel and had to be careful not to take the first curves between the rows of cars too sweepingly. It was exactly two minutes past eleven. He should be home in fifteen minutes.



“Just about on time,” muttered Pete. He turned up the radio and just heard the end of the news. “A major United Nations conference in Europe had once again failed to agree on what should be done to combat global warming.”

Pete rolled onto the main road and only half heard the beginning of the sports news. His favourite basketball team from Los Angeles had lost to a Texas team. In the darkness, the last low buildings of the industrial area flitted by. Pete turned off the radio again to hum his favourite song of the Red Demons.

Then he felt a movement in his back. Something cold, hard bore into the back of his neck. Pete let go of the wheel and reached back.

“Watch it!” someone hissed. “Both hands on the wheel!”

Pete withdrew his arm and involuntarily stepped on the brakes.

“Move on!” came the command promptly. The pressure in the neck increased.

“And if I don’t?”

“You’ll regret this!” the voice barked. “We’re going for a drive in the woods.”

“Why?” asked Pete. “My parents are waiting for me.”

“If you don’t do what I tell you, they’ll be waiting for you for a very long time.” The voice was razor-sharp. The hard, cold object was still firmly pressed against the back of Pete’s neck, and that pushed his head forward a little.

He decided to give in. Gently he accelerated and rolled on until a narrow side path came into the light of the headlights.

“Turn right in there!” the harsh voice said.

Pete obeyed. He felt his heart pounding. After barely a hundred metres, the forest began.

“Stop here!” was the order when they reached it. “Lights out!”

Pete stopped the car and turned off the headlights. Suspiciously he drew in the air, because suddenly there was a strange smell in the car. Something soft suddenly lay over his mouth and nose. It shot through his head. Very quickly, he passed out!

For Jupiter, the day had begun so beautifully. He started with a very cosy breakfast with scrambled eggs, bacon and ham in the kitchen of Uncle Titus and Aunt Mathilda. The two were in high spirits.

In a good mood, he smoothed the ends of his powerful black moustache and asked Jupiter to tell him what was going on at school and which case the famous detective trio of Jupiter Jones, Pete Crenshaw and Bob Andrews were working on.

But Jupiter didn't have anything special to report, at school everything went on as usual. This meant that the mastermind Jupiter Jones collected only the best grades in all subjects—except sports—just like other boys in his class collected stamps or beer mats or the photos of baseball heroes. “And we don't have a case right now,” Jupiter added.

Uncle Titus looked at him slyly. “That must be because,” he looked at the kitchen clock and stood up, “the gangsters in and around Rocky Beach just don't dare do evil anymore. And three guesses why.”

Aunt Mathilda gave her husband a disapproving look. “You should not mock the young, Titus Jones.”

She also got up and began to clear the breakfast table. “Sometimes I wonder who's more successful—you with your salvage yard business or the guys with their detective agency!”

Uncle Titus pretended not to hear. Instead, he began to talk verbosely about the client he would meet in Los Angeles in two hours.

Inside, Jupe shook his head. He really liked his uncle and aunt. They were kind people. But they occasionally had a strange way of talking to each other, or rather not talking.

Uncle Titus said goodbye. A little later, they heard his old truck chugging away from the salvage yard.

“You could be so kind and get me the big ladder from the storeroom,” said Aunt Mathilda. It sounded very enterprising. “I'll start in the living room.”

“Start what?”

“Hang back the curtains. Didn't you notice that I washed them all yesterday? They are all dried now.”

Jupe had to say no. For better or worse, he got into the storeroom and dragged the ladder out. It was pretty heavy.

## 2. Crash in the Morning

“Put them over there,” Aunt Mathilda ordered and pointed to the furthest corner of the spacious living room. With a soft sigh, Jupiter shouldered the ladder and dragged it to the desired place. Just as he placed the ladder, Aunt Mathilda’s voice was already booming from the kitchen. “Would you help me carry the laundry basket in? I can’t carry all the curtains alone.”

This time Jupiter was content with a little grimace. He knew resistance was futile. Now there was only one thing to do—to help without complaining. After that, it was all the more reason for him to disappear into the old trailer, where The Three Investigators had their headquarters.

Together with Aunt Mathilda, he carried the full laundry basket into the living room. “Be so good as to hold on to the bottom of the ladder,” said Aunt Mathilda, after she had taken out one curtain from a jumble of the folded fabrics. She climbed up rung by rung, holding the curtain like a baby in both hands. “I don’t really trust that ladder anymore. I’m sure it is at least as old as me.”

Then she is still young and fresh, Jupiter was about to say, but he did not get around to that. At the same moment, when Aunt Mathilda stretched herself to fix the curtain hem, she lost her balance. The curtain fell to the floor while Aunt Mathilda desperately tried to hold on. At the last moment, she got hold of the curtain rod. But Aunt Mathilda proved to be too weighty and took the bar down with her. A scream went up and down the house. Jupiter jumped onto the lowest step and stretched out both hands to his aunt as if he could catch her.

Jupiter was shocked Aunt Mathilda staggered, tilted and smashed the floor vase with one clean stroke. But even he could not prevent her from crashing to the ground with a loud “Aaaahh!”

Uncle Titus, who sometimes got into a fight with his wife because of his special taste for that vase. He appreciated it very much because of its painting in yellow, ochre and pale pink.

But never mind about the vase. Almost immediately, Jupiter was bent over his aunt. She lay on the ground helpless and was as white as a sheet.

“Oh, my goodness!” she stammered. Her hand groped for her shoulder. When she touched it, she cried out again. Then she closed her eyes.

For a moment, Jupiter was stunned with horror. Then Aunt Mathilda opened her eyes again. “Do something!” she said in a weak voice. She tried to straighten up and immediately began to groan violently.

“Better lie still!” Jupiter said. Who knows how injured she was—a concussion, a broken shoulder or both. He squeezed her hand firmly. “I’m calling Dr Morrison.”

He went to the phone and called the family doctor. He almost expected to hear lectures, but Dr Morrison only said he would be there in ten minutes, and Aunt Mathilda should not move for that long.

A good half hour later, an ambulance left the salvage yard. Dr Morrison had advised the immediate admission of Aunt Mathilda to Rocky Beach Hospital. The preliminary diagnosis was a broken shoulder, bruises, skin abrasions and a mild concussion.

“Don’t worry,” Dr Morrison reassured Jupiter as they watched the ambulance drive away. “It is unpleasant and painful for your aunt. But in a few weeks she’ll be back to normal.”

“A few weeks?” Jupe looked up at the doctor in disbelief.

“Three to four weeks.”

Jupiter had to think of Uncle Titus. How could he go this long without his wife? It hadn’t happened for years that Aunt Mathilda, the absolute mistress of the house, was away for so long.

The doctor’s voice tore him from his thoughts. “Couldn’t you have been a little more careful? And also, if you had hung the curtains yourself, this wouldn’t have happened.”

Silently, Jupiter looked at the doctor. He could think of an appropriate response. A little later, the doctor’s car also left the salvage yard.

“Thank you for your help,” Jupiter heard himself mumble.

When he walked through the hall to the phone a little later, the house seemed strangely empty to him. He had to tell someone about Aunt Mathilda’s misfortune. He picked up the phone and dialled Pete’s number. He couldn’t reach Uncle Titus now and Bob was on a bicycle trip to the sea with his girlfriend Elizabeth.

As the phone rang, Jupiter kept nervously running his hand through his hair. Possibly the plans they had made for the upcoming summer holidays

would all fall through. "I must look after Uncle Titus," Jupiter said quietly to himself.

"Hello." That was the voice of Pete's mother. Jupiter noticed immediately that something was wrong. Mrs Crenshaw didn't sound so rushed.

"Jupiter here," said the First Investigator. "Good afternoon, Mrs Crenshaw. May I speak to Pete?"

At the other end of the line, a disappointed sigh could be heard. "Pete? I have no idea where he is. We're very worried."

"What happened?"

"He hasn't come back yet." Now the voice of Pete's mother sounded really desperate.

Jupiter calmly asked Mrs Crenshaw to tell everything in order. After all, he knew from countless detective films that during critical events, how important it was for the hero to show prudence and nerves of steel while the others went crazy.

"Pete took Kelly to the new disco last night," Mrs Crenshaw said.

"I know," replied Jupiter.

"And they both promised that Pete would be home by half past eleven at the latest. He went to bed pretty late a couple of nights in a row."

"And he did not come back?" asked Juve and at the same moment he realized how superfluous the question was. He looked at his watch. It was half past eight. "Have you called Kelly yet?"

"Of course. A couple of times. But nobody answered."

Jupiter frowned and was glad that Pete's mother could not see this. He didn't like that story at all.

"You know—" He cleared his throat. "That Pete is sometimes not the most reliable," Jupiter said. "He might have spent the night at Kelly's again. Probably the two of them are all broken up from all the noise and dancing, and neither of them can hear the phone." He thought about it for a moment and then decided to tell a white lie. "Kelly's parents are away for the weekend."

"Really?"

"Anyway, I remember Kelly saying something like that the other day." Actually he made it up, but it was useful to calm Pete's mother a little.

"You think so?" She seemed to be getting her hopes up again. "But if that's the way it is, then he's in for a treat."

Jupiter wondered if a little joke was in order. “How about a three-day house detention?” he suggested. His throat suddenly felt very dry, and he had to cough.

“Punishment is necessary,” Mrs Crenshaw agreed with him.

“Give him my regards as soon as he shows up again,” Jupiter said.

“Have him call me. I have news for him.”

Fortunately, Mrs Crenshaw wasn’t curious to know what it was about. She said goodbye and hung up. Jupiter immediately dialled Kelly’s number.

The First Investigator let it ring long. Just as he was about to hang up, there was a crack in the line.

“Hi,” said a happy Kelly.

Jupiter felt his heart slipping into his pants. “Uh, hi Kelly!”

Kelly apparently recognized his voice immediately. “Yeah?” she said.

“Where is Pete?” Jupe asked sternly.

“How should I know?”

“He’s not with you?”

“No.”

Jupiter sighed. He had to get to the point. “He did not go home last night. Did you go to the disco yesterday?”

For a few seconds it remained silent on the line.

“Indeed,” Kelly then replied quietly. “An hour before midnight, we left the parking lot.”

### **3. A Prison in the Forest**

Pete was feeling very drowsy. He vaguely recalled what happened the night before. He remembered seeing how the headlights of his car flashed over the walls of the disco. Then it stroked over a grove. It happened oddly fast. Finally, he passed out. Suddenly, the realization woke him up for good. He opened his eyes.

It was almost dark around him. Groaning, the Second Investigator propped himself up and discovered a dull and weak reddish light a few metres away.

“Where am I?” he muttered. He closed his eyes and tried to concentrate. A very fine rose scent came to his nose, which he recognized immediately—ether. And in that second everything came back to him—the night drive home, the cold metal on his neck and the voice from behind.

“Is anybody here?” he tried to shout, but all he could produce was an ugly croak. He cleared his throat and took a fresh start. This time it worked better. But somehow it sounded ridiculous.

Nothing moved. Pete shook his head, like a boxer who has to digest a hit, and jumped to his feet.

He walked towards the light. It was a miner’s lamp that gave off a yellow-red glow. When Pete lifted it up, there was a rattling sound. A steel chain was attached to the lamp and ran from there to a hook in the wall. Peter swallowed. Angrily he tugged at the lamp, but it couldn’t be moved for more than half a metre. After only two metres from the lamp, the light was lost in a darkness that seemed mocking and threatening. Pete could not even see what else was in the room.

With both hands Pete drove into the pockets of his jeans. It was empty! In addition to his wallet and a number of other items that he always carried with him, his pocket knife and lighter had also disappeared. Panic rose in him. Whoever had brought him here had made sure that he could not even see his prison properly. Carelessly he dropped the lamp on the floor and started hammering against the wall with both fists. Only then, he realized that the wall was wooden. The wood was thick and heavy, so there was not much chance that he could break through it.

“Hey!” cried Pete with all his might. “Hey! I want to get out of here!” He lowered his arms and listened. Nothing. He tried to force himself to rest. “Just don’t freak out,” he said out loud.

He turned around and stared into the interior of the room. At least he wanted to know how big his dungeon was. He knew that the distance from his left shoulder to the tip of his right arm stretched out horizontally was about one metre. So with his left shoulder at one corner of the wall, he held out this right arm, and groped his way along the wall, counting. At ‘eight’ his hands hit the other corner. It was also wood, he noted.

He turned and did the same for the perpendicular wall. He reached the corner at ‘six’. It was the same smooth wooden wall everywhere. “Eight metres long, six metres wide,” Pete murmured thoughtfully. “Very generous indeed.”

With outstretched hands he walked out into the whole dark room. Apparently, it was completely empty. Also his feet met no resistance, until he came to the corner of the longitudinal wall opposite the lamp. His lower leg hit something hard. He bent down and felt something soft with a rough surface. He leaned on it with both hands. It gave way slightly. Pete felt the blood shoot into his head and at the same time a cold shiver ran down his back. With a few hand movements, he finally was certain. He stood in front of a metal bed with a mattress and a woollen blanket.

Suddenly he realized what this meant. Someone had played a little, albeit very nasty joke on him. This was a prison which had been set up for him. He let himself fall onto the mattress, crumpled the blanket under his head and folded his hands. The next moment he jumped up again. There had to be a door somewhere. Again he began to scan the wall.

And indeed, after only a few metres he hit a handle. It was cold and very solid and felt like cast iron. Pete shook it desperately, but as much as he tried, it was all in vain.

Breathing heavily he went back to his metal bed. He crouched on the edge and buried his head between his hands. Now it was less fear than anger that gripped him.

He imagined what would happen if he got hold of the villain who had put him in this situation. As he was in the process of beating the living daylights out of the villain, Pete called himself to order.

“Nonsense!” he said out loud. Instead of dreaming of bloody revenge, it was much more important to think about how he could get out of here.



He concentrated his senses on his surroundings. The first thing he noticed was the air he was slowly sucking in. It tasted different from the ones he was used to from the city. Now he pulled it in sharply and inflated the nostrils. Then he held his breath. There was a deep silence around him. Or is it? With his mouth half open he listened. The next moment he didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

What he inhaled there was undoubtedly clear, spicy forest air, and what he heard from afar, almost imperceptibly, was the chirping of birds.

At least there is something alive, he thought. He kept thinking. Who drugged him and brought him here? And if he failed to free himself, would Jupe and Bob ever find him?

Now he felt the fear rising again. He laboriously suppressed them. He's fine, he comforted himself. He's not hurt and he can fight. He got up and started with the thirty squats he did every day. This was followed by twenty push-ups. Pete Crenshaw was the sports ace in high school, and a little exercise couldn't get him out of breath.

He wondered what time it was. He felt his wrist and found that his watch was gone. Pete clenched his fists in an impotent rage.

"Just you wait," he shouted. "You'll pay for this!"

After his call to Kelly, Jupiter had spent the next hours with growing concern. Secretly he had set himself a deadline of two o'clock in the afternoon to come up with something.

In the meantime, Mrs Crenshaw had enquired whether Pete had appeared at Jupiter's house or had contacted him from somewhere. Jupiter did not tell her that he had reached Kelly, and she didn't know what had happened to Pete after leaving the disco.

Around noon, he called the hospital, learned at the emergency room that his aunt was doing well, and asked if a Pete Crenshaw had been admitted. But there was no patient by that name.

Without much hope, Jupiter called Bob. There he only reached Mr Andrews. Bob was not back from the beach.

"What happened?" asked Mr Andrews. He worked as a journalist for the *Los Angeles Times* and was a very sympathetic and compassionate man. "You sound a little excited."

"I—uh, Pete," the First Investigator stammered, "Pete's missing."

"What does that mean 'missing'?" researched Mr Andrews.

“He took Kelly to the new disco on the outskirts of town last night. They left the parking lot. Pete wanted to go home, as he had promised to be home half an hour before midnight. Since then, he’s not back.”

“Hmm.” And then Mr Andrews didn’t say anything at first.

Jupiter knew Bob’s father and knew that he did not make cheap speeches.

“It doesn’t look good. Have you called the police yet?”

“Not yet,” replied Jupiter. “But if he hasn’t shown up by 2 pm this afternoon, I don’t think we’ll have any choice.”

“Very reasonable,” said Mr Andrews. “I’ll tell Bob when he comes back. Keep me posted.”

Jupiter promised and said goodbye. No sooner had he hung up than he heard a car door slam and Uncle Titus’s steps outside the front door. With a queasy feeling in his stomach, Jupiter went to meet him.

Uncle Titus seemed to notice immediately that something was wrong. He stopped and put his head at an angle. “Where’s your aunt? Where is she?”

Jupiter was amazed. Was Uncle Titus psychic? “Please don’t chicken out,” he said and pulled him into the living room by his sleeve. “She’s in hospital. But it’s nothing bad.”

The ends of Uncle Titus’s proud moustache seemed to tremble. “In the hospital? Why?”

“She was hanging up the curtains,” Jupiter began, pointing to the ladder that was still on the floor, amidst the pitiful debris of Uncle Titus’s favourite vase. “Then she lost her balance.”

Two minutes later, the engine of Uncle Titus’s rickety truck roared. Jupiter had convinced him that it would be better for Aunt Mathilda if her husband visited her alone at her bedside for the time being. And he was glad that Uncle Titus had not wasted any time questioning why Jupiter had not been able to prevent the accident.

## **4. A Fool Leaves Traces**

As Jupiter was just about to remove the traces of Aunt Mathilda's fall in the living room, the doorbell rang. Jupiter sent a quick prayer that Pete stood at the door and could tell a good story about where he had been since last night and why he hadn't contacted anyone.

He swung open the front door and looked into Kelly's frightened face. She was wearing black leather jeans and a bright red, hip-length sweater. With nervous movements, she stroked the hair from her forehead. "Any news?"

"Nothing."

Kelly rushed past him into the hall as if she thought Pete was hiding there. Jupe took a deep breath and told her that he had called the hospital and that no patient named Pete Crenshaw had been admitted. Her expression was one of doubt as to whether she should consider this good news or bad news. "Then we have to report him missing to the police."

He looked at his watch. It was ten past one. "Actually, I was going to wait until 2 pm. Whatever." He picked up the phone and dialled Inspector Cotta's number.

Cotta was a capable police officer at the Rocky Beach Police Department and had helped The Three Investigators many times before. At least as often, however, the boys had been able to present the resolution of a case to him. Cotta, they knew, thought highly of the young detectives and had defended them when his colleagues occasionally grumbled. Some thought that Jupiter and his two friends were interfering in things that should be left to the police. As usual, the inspector was available at his desk.

"Good afternoon, Inspector Cotta," Jupiter said in a husky voice.

"Afternoon, Sherlock Holmes." When Cotta spoke to him like that, he was usually in a good mood. "Where can I pick up Al Capone?"

Jupiter made a grimace. He would have been only too happy to come up with a success story and deliver a gangster boss like the legendary Chicago crime king to the inspector. But there was really no question of that.

“Today we’re the ones who would like to pick someone up... Pete. He is missing,” reported Jupiter rather sheepishly. “I think we need your help.”

“Doesn’t sound like that at all,” it came out of the receiver. “Is this a real missing persons report?”

“I fear so,” replied Jupiter and described in a few sentences what had happened. From the rustling of paper, Jupiter could tell that the inspector was taking notes. “When do the holidays begin?”

“On Thursday. In four days.”

“Okay. But don’t worry too much. It will probably turn out to be harmless in the end—like most missing-persons cases. Nevertheless, I will inform the officers who are on duty today. They should keep their eyes and ears open. And if Pete doesn’t come to school tomorrow morning, then —” Cotta faltered.

“Then what?” asked Jupiter.

“Then they’ll really look for him—with all the trimmings. I promise you that.”

Kelly picked up the phone from Jupiter. “This is Kelly. I am Pete’s girlfriend,” she said. Her voice trembled a little. “You must do your best, Inspector.”

With a heavy heart, Jupiter called Mrs Crenshaw and told her that he had just informed the police. “Just in case,” he added. “You know we have a good friend sitting there.” But from the taciturn answer, he could sense that she was now facing the greatest fear.

“What can we do?” Kelly looked perplexed and unhappy when Juve hung up.

“At least not just sit here and twiddle our thumbs,” Jupiter decided. “Did you drive here?”

Kelly said yes. Nevertheless, he suggested getting two bicycles from the storeroom. “A little investigation might help,” he said.

“And where are we going?” Kelly asked.

“To the disco. To the parking lot where you last saw him.”

Half an hour later, they arrived in front of the disco. Far and wide not a soul could be seen in the inhospitable industrial area. Right behind the open barrier at the entrance, they leaned their bikes against the wall separating the parking lot from the side walk. There were three cars on the

premises. They seemed so lonely and abandoned, as if their owners had left them here to never have anything to do with them again.

Kelly showed Juve the place where Pete had waved goodbye to her. "And do you know where his MG was?" the First Investigator wanted to know.

"Not exactly. Probably over there." She pointed to the north corner, across the driveway. "Anyway, he came from there when we met at 8 pm."

Jupiter and Kelly took their time and searched every square metre on a wide strip left and right of their path.

The parking lot was littered with soda cans, chewing gum paper and cigarette remains. Quite a few seemed to throw their rubbish carelessly out of the car window, trusting that others would pick it up again. Jupiter had little hope that something useful would be there. Out of the corner of his eye he looked at Kelly. She probably felt the same way.

"Maybe here." Kelly stopped. "He could have been standing here." At this point they searched even more thoroughly. But they found nothing suspicious.

"Over there. We should take a closer look." And there went Kelly. Her outstretched index finger pointed to the ground.

Jupiter came closer. "Someone's been waiting for someone here for quite a while. He smoked a lot of cigarettes. And when the package was empty, he threw it out the window."

Jupiter bent down. In fact, within a radius of no more than one and a half metres there were many cigarette butts. On most of the butts, they would see the brand name 'Clint'. The accompanying package was crumpled, but the material was also still in good condition.

The First Investigator straightened up and buried his hands in his trousers pockets. "It rained pretty hard twice during the day yesterday," he noted. His eyes wandered from the cigarette butts to Kelly and back again.

She looked rather sullen. "You're thinking the same thing I am," she said.

"This stuff can't be here any longer than it was last night," he went on. "Pete did not have a car accident, otherwise he would be in hospital. So maybe somebody waited for him in the parking lot here. He waited a long time and smoked a lot. An unhealthy living person—a chain smoker."

Jupiter looked around. "Be right back."

Next to the disco entrance he had discovered a waste basket. He went over, rummaged through the rubbish for a moment and came back with an

empty plastic bag. While collecting the cigarette butts, he took a look at Kelly's face. "Why are you looking so critical?" he wanted to know.

She looked down on him. "If someone has been waiting for him here, the cigarette remains and the package do not necessarily have to come from him."

"Of course," replied Jupe. "However, it is very strange to see someone sitting outside a disco for an entire evening. Usually you go to a disco to go in and not stay out. And dating is not usually done with the person picking you up sitting in the car for hours."

"Right," Kelly agreed with him.

"Come," he said and took her gently by the arm. They went back to their bikes. For the first time that day, the June sun broke through the cloud cover and seemed to evaporate it with its hot rays.

Kelly stopped. "Still, there's something wrong with that theory."

Astonished, Jupiter raised his eyebrows. With all due respect to Kelly—but he couldn't stand being told by others that there was something wrong with his theories. Usually he was the first to discover contradictions. Why else was he called the mastermind?

"And what's wrong with that, may I ask?" he asked ungraciously. For a moment he forgot completely why they had come.

"Pretty basic." Kelly stared at the spot where they had found the cigarette butts. "If someone ambushed Pete, there are two possibilities. Either he broke into Pete's car and hid in the back, or he waited in his own car or outside. Then he must have forced himself in the moment Pete entered. Even if he had a gun with him and pointed it at Pete, he had to risk being noticed by other disco-goers."

Jupiter nodded. "So the only safe way for him was to lie down in the back of Pete's car and wait. And when Pete came and drove off, he put a gun to his head from behind."

She looked at him blankly. "But if it was that, it wasn't him who puffed so much," she said coolly.

"Right. When a non-smoker opens a car in which so much smoke has been smoked, he will notice it immediately. So Pete would have been warned and certainly would not have got into the car."

"There is only one conclusion to be drawn from this." With a jerk, Kelly threw her hair over her shoulder. "If Pete's disappearance has anything at all to do with this parking lot and if this chain smoker was

involved, then he was in a second car. In a way, as support for whoever was waiting in Pete's car."

"Exactly," Jupe repeated eagerly. "He had two jobs—wait and see if everything would go on as planned. And then he had to drive off the car the kidnapper came in."

Kelly winced. For the first time, the word had been spoken that had haunted her mind for hours and that she had been afraid to say before.

Jupiter almost had to smile, he was so proud of what they had discovered in such a short time. "So we're dealing with at least two persons, at least, if our pre-conditions are right. And probably the person who sat in his own car and smoked constantly is not the brightest. Otherwise he wouldn't have left so many traces of his nicotine addiction here at the crime scene."

"So the other chap who was sitting in Pete's car didn't realize that his accomplice was giving us leads." Kelly's face darkened. Jupiter thought he saw tears in her eyes. She quickly bent over her bike as if she had to check if the saddle was properly fitted. "Maybe Pete now knows exactly who his captor is, who got into his car in this very spot." She fell silent.

Jupe understood what she was thinking about. But he thought it was better not to talk about what would happen if Pete's kidnappers had no intention of releasing him. Because then they wouldn't care what Pete knew about them...

At the same time as Inspector Cotta called Pete's parents and asked if they would agree to an official missing persons search, Pete woke up from a noise. For hours, he had rolled on the mattress from one side to the other. Again and again, he had fallen into a restless sleep, only to wake up again shortly afterwards.

He didn't know what time of day it was. For this he had soon lost all feelings in his dark prison. His hand passed over his forehead. This time, he was sure it had been a real noise that had woken him from his sleep. He leaned on the mattress, held his breath and listened.

Boom, boom, boom—it came from the wooden wall right behind him. Pete suddenly turned around.

There it was again—boom, boom, boom. Then everything went quiet.

Next a voice was heard. It was strongly muffled by the wall, but it was clearly audible: "Hey! Wake up! Breakfast!"

It was throbbing again. And then a strange noise followed, which Pete listened but could not interpret properly at first.

In the next moment, he realized that the voice had laughed. He clenched his fists. He wouldn't forget that laugh. It had been a deep laugh, from a man who was no longer young.

"You won't laugh like that," growled Pete. "I swear."

He now only heard the usual chirping of the birds from outside. Pete sharply sucked air through his nose and perceived a smell that had not existed in the wooden hut before. Then he jumped up and walked the few steps over to the miner's lamp. There was nothing there.

Pete stretched out his arms and groped his way through the darkness towards the door. His foot struck something hard.

He bent down, and felt a flat piece of wood. He lifted it up and only then he realized that it was a wooden tray. Two apples rolled around on it, and in the middle were four slices of bread and a piece of sausage. The silver grey of a Thermos flask shone at the edge.

Pete put the tray down, unscrewed the cap of the bottle and sniffed. The smell of hot coffee drifted out. For a few seconds, Pete stood irresolutely with the bottle in his hand. The coffee smelled tempting, and the sight of the apples and the sausage aroused something like a ravenous appetite.

At the same time, he felt the urgent desire to throw the whole thing on the floor or against the wall and trample on it with his feet until it would be nothing but inedible mash. "I'd like that," he hissed. "I'm not touching any of that!"

Soon after, the Second Investigator had changed his mind. "After all, I can only harm myself," he murmured. "I must eat and keep up my strength." He took the tray and squatted cross-legged on the floor. First he took one of the two apples in his hand, but he put it aside again.

"I'll save the fruit," he said to himself. He took a slice of bread and began to chew it carefully. He smelled the sausage with relish before slowly eating it. Then he took his first sip of coffee. It could have been stronger, he thought.

Suddenly, he realized something. This really was a prison. What he was given to eat was food of the kind that was given to prisoners. His hand slapped his forehead. "Revenge!" cried Pete. "Somebody's out to get me."

He jumped up involuntarily, as if something practical was to be done immediately with that realization. But then he became aware of his



situation. He rushed to the door in the dark, felt for the wrought-iron handle and shook it with all his might until his hands hurt. He clenched his aching fingers and drummed against the wall of the hut.

“I want to get out of here!” he yelled. “I want to get out of here! Get me out of here!”

## 5. The Inner Voice

After school, Jupiter and Bob went to Pete's house. Jupiter was very happy that Bob was finally back and both could work together in this unpleasant situation. And now they sat on the sofa in the Crenshaws' living room and did their best to comfort the couple.

"You can't deny that something happened the night before last!" cried Mrs Crenshaw bitterly. "Something's happened to my son!"

"We think so too," replied Jupiter. He tried to speak as factually as possible. Mrs Crenshaw was an intelligent woman and would not have believed him anyway, if he had only made unbelievable sayings. The First Investigator took a deep breath. Then he clamped the palms of his hands between his knees and gave himself a jerk. "Now that he has been missing for over 40 hours, we must assume—" He cleared his throat.

Mr Crenshaw looked at the two detectives with irritation. He walked up and down the room incessantly. His wife had already asked him to sit down twice, but he did not seem to hear her at all.

"Do you believe that this is a kidnapping case?" Mr Crenshaw cried. "I've just spoken to that sergeant again. Colby—is that his name?"

"Cotta," Bob replied. "His name is Cotta. He's an inspector." Bob tried hard not to sound insolent.

Since Jupiter had told him about Pete's disappearance in the morning at school, he just couldn't get rid of the strange feeling that there was no danger at all. Sure, something had happened, and certainly Pete had not disappeared voluntarily. "But my sixth sense tells me," he had said, looking Jupiter in the eye, "that Pete will soon be spending the holidays with us in his old freshness."

"All right. Cotta, if you like. Inspector Cotta." Pete's father had arrived at one end of the living room, turned on his heel and walked in the opposite direction. "Anyway, the police think Pete has been kidnapped."

"We share this view," Jupe proclaimed and felt flattered. For a moment, the First Investigator thought about whether he should tell Pete's father that the police had taken this kidnapping theory from him. But then he thought it would be better to keep this information to himself. It seemed

more modest, and besides, Mr Crenshaw should not lose the rest of his confidence in the local police. That didn't seem like too much anyway.

"Would you like tea?" Mrs Crenshaw had stood up. "I forgot to offer you something. I'm completely confused."

Jupiter and Bob waved off with thanks. "We don't have much time either," said Jupiter. "We must go straight to Inspector Cotta at police department..."

"All right," Mr Crenshaw interrupted him. "And why, may I ask, do you share this view about kidnapping?"

Jupiter looked at him attentively. His face was slightly redder than usual.

"Very simply," Bob intervened. "He disappeared without a trace, as did his car. A traffic accident is therefore out of the question. He probably didn't go on a major trip of his own free will without telling you."

"He was to return home at half past eleven on Saturday night," Mrs Crenshaw said.

"Exactly," Jupiter agreed.

"And finally," Bob continued thoughtfully, "Jupiter and Kelly discovered certain clues that someone might have been waiting for Pete in the parking lot in front of the disco the night before last."

In the middle of his walk, Mr Crenshaw paused. "That Colby didn't tell me a thing about it," he said.

"It's just a possibility. Nothing more." Jupe got up. He felt a powerful urge to move and would have liked to march through the living room next to Mr Crenshaw, but that would have looked too funny. "It's just a theory."

"What theory?" Mr Crenshaw was blushing with excitement. "My son is kidnapped! This is too silly." He took a step towards Jupiter and almost stopped threateningly in front of him. "You know perfectly well that I never interfered in your detective games." He paused and seemed to think about the meaning of the last sentence. Then he obviously realized that he had offended his two guests a little.

"Yes, I do appreciate the work that you have put in," he added in a conciliatory manner. "But this case is a bit different. Pete is your close friend, so you have to be careful not to let your emotions affect your judgements."

He bent over the living room table. "I'm not a millionaire whose fortune can be extorted by criminals!"

Although some months had passed since their last meeting, Cotta seemed slightly changed. The black hair has become a little greyer and a little less, the First Investigator noticed that when he shook the inspector's hand and took a seat.

Jupiter quickly let his eyes wander through the room. Here, everything was as it had been when they had been sitting in these chairs, grudgingly listening to the police inspector. His eyes fell on the larger-than-life poster of Humphrey Bogart. Jupiter thought that it was typical of Cotta to hang in his office, the picture of his movie hero, with his coat collar turned up, his hat pulled low into his forehead and the inevitable cigarette in the corner of his mouth.

The inspector worked a lot, but he made a point of not always being deeply serious in his job. Jupiter noticed the probing look with which the police officer looked at them.

"Any news?" Cotta asked soberly.

Jupiter shook his head. "None. Unfortunately."

"Here's something for you." Bob put a plastic bag on the desk. "As promised. The cigarette butts from the chain smoker in the parking lot."

Cotta bent forward. "Clint," he muttered. "A rare brand." Then he frowned. "I don't like this. A person who waits for his victim in a parking lot and leaves such marks must be pretty stupid."

He pressed a button on his phone and said, "Tell Bill to come up from the lab." He leaned back and crossed his hands at the back of his neck. "If the whole kidnapping story is true at all, I'd rather that the perpetrators be bright fellows."

"Why?" Bob asked, earning a disapproving look from the First Investigator. Jupe was annoyed that Bob had embarrassed The Three Investigators.

"Because smart people wouldn't be stupid enough to really hurt him." Jupiter got up, lowered his hands into his jeans pockets and stood by the window. "But we assume that the chain-smoker was just doing a supporting role anyway."

"I know," Cotta nodded. "The real kidnapper must have been waiting in Pete's car."

"And now you want to know from us what motive there might be for kidnapping our Second Investigator," Jupiter said.

Cotta's hands played with a pencil. "You guessed right. So, what do you think?"

Bob sensed a good chance to making up with his earlier remark. Before Jupiter could open his mouth again, he thrust out: "Revenge. Somebody's out to get back at Pete. Someone that Pete has exposed as a criminal."

"However, we have to accept that as a possibility," Jupiter thought of it, "that the kidnappers were not specifically after Pete. It could be that he was just randomly chosen."

"Maybe they even drew lots to see which of the three of us they should take," Bob said eagerly.

Cotta nodded thoughtfully. "Seems pretty plausible to me. It could have been that way."

Bob moved towards to Cotta's desk. "Assuming the kidnapping theory is correct, then the culprit is hardly likely to be some little fish we once got in the way of."

"The only person we can think of," cried Jupiter from the window, "is someone we have put behind bars."

It looked as if the inspector had to suppress a grin because of the competition of ideas the two of them were holding in front of him. In any case, Jupiter had the impression that the corner of Cotta's mouth was twitching suspiciously.

"The conclusion from this is that we need to get into our computer and get a list of all our cases where the perpetrator ended with jail time," Bob said.

Cotta raised his eyebrows in astonishment. "Do you really keep such records?"

"Of course," replied Jupiter. "We are very proud of our achievements. We make it a point to document all our cases. Don't you do that as well?"

"We have so much to do," replied the inspector, "that our people simply can't find the time to keep our electronic archives up to date, although I have to admit that it would be useful."

He came around his desk. "And how many perpetrators do you think would have ended up on your list?"

Jupiter was counting short. "A dozen at least," he finally said.

"Well then, what are you waiting for? Go to your headquarters, turn on your computer, print out the list and come back here. And then we'll take a closer look at those people."

“I have to go to the hospital first to see my aunt. She fell off a ladder.”

“Sorry.” Cotta put on a mischievous grin. “Happens on Rocky Beach an average of 12 times a year.” Then he got serious again. “I’ve already phoned Pete’s parents. Of course they’re very worried. May I ask why you’re so cool?”

Jupe shrugged his shoulders. Then he stroked his stomach.

“An inner voice,” he proclaimed, “says that things would work out.”

And Bob echoed: “An inner voice. Right. Me too.”

Cotta put his hands on his hips. “I hope you’re right,” he said. His doubtful expression did not escape Jupiter.

## 6. An Inquisitive Roommate

Jupiter had never liked hospitals. Even in Rocky Beach hospital, the wide, impersonal corridors smelled as if the cleaning staff had poured out buckets of disinfectant there. When Jupiter got off the lift on the third floor, he almost involuntarily covered his nose, the smell was so obtrusive. But right in front of him stood a doctor in a long white coat and looked at him grumpily. Jupiter quickly lowered his hand.

In the ward, a nurse came to meet him. She had long blond hair and a snub nose with funny freckles. "Can I help you?" she asked nicely.

"I'm looking for Mrs Jones," Jupiter said. "Unfortunately, I don't know her room number."

The nurse turned on her heel. "We're standing right in front of it. Room 304."

Shortly afterwards, Jupe sat on the edge of the bed with his aunt. "Does it hurt?" he asked sympathetically. He guessed that he could have saved himself the question.

Aunt Mathilda wasn't looking well at all. A splendid bruise decorated her chin. She pulled her face painfully and pointed to her shoulder, which was stuck together with her arm in a huge white bandage. "I can hardly move," she smiled faintly.

"Dr Morrison thinks you'll be out of here in three to four weeks," Jupiter said, before it occurred to him that it might not be so clever to give her the family doctor's opinion.

"Three to four weeks?" Promptly, Aunt Mathilda seemed to become a little paler. "The doctors here at the hospital said two to three weeks."

Jupiter smiled encouragingly to her. "Uncle Titus is doing quite well, not least with my help, of course. But I think he'd be glad if you came home soon."

"You shouldn't listen to doctors anyway," suddenly a voice came from the other bed.

Jupiter turned around startled. He saw a plastered leg stretched out towards the ceiling. When Jupiter came in, the patient had closed her eyes

so he thought that she was asleep. Now she sparkled over to him wide awake. She had bright red hair and an unusually pointed nose.

“This is my nephew, Jupiter,” Aunt Mathilda said to the woman. “And this is Mrs Fiedler.”

“Good afternoon.” Jupiter was a bit confused, and since he couldn’t think of anything else, he added: “I wish you a speedy recovery.”

“Recovery?” Mrs Fiedler uttered the word as if she had rarely heard anything so ridiculous. “How can anything get better in a hospital like this?” She grabbed the hook that hung over her and pulled herself up by it, groaning.

“There are fools everywhere who take themselves seriously. Those soulless white coats will mend you like a broomstick.”

Jupiter stared at Mrs Fiedler. Behind him he heard Aunt Mathilda puffing. “He meant well, Erna,” she said. Her nephew was amazed. After all, it wasn’t in Aunt Mathilda’s habit to get to know someone so quickly.

Jupiter felt his aunt’s hand in his back. “She insists that I call her Erna,” she whispered. “She’s a little strange, but I think she’s quite alright, actually.”

Jupiter nodded. “And how did this happen, Mrs Fiedler?” He pointed to her plastered leg.

The eyes of Aunt Mathilda’s roommate sparkled at him. She was now sitting almost upright in her bed, and Jupiter wondered that this was possible at all with her leg protruding upwards. Mrs Fiedler, he deduced immediately, must be exceptionally flexible.

“I can tell you exactly,” Mrs Fiedler replied in a tone of voice, as if she was about to reveal a particularly nasty crime. “Fishing!”

“Fishing?” Jupiter opened his mouth and eyes, and before he knew it, a “I haven’t heard anything so funny in a long time!” slipped out. Aunt Mathilda nudged him in the back, but of course it was too late.

“Funny?” Mrs Fiedler’s voice came thick and fast. “I’ve been lying in this dungeon for three weeks, suffering the most horrible pain, maltreated every day by unsuspecting quacks—and you think that’s funny?”

Jupiter gritted his teeth. He didn’t know whether to laugh or be shocked that Mrs Fiedler had misunderstood him so badly. In the next second, the sharp-minded First Investigator saw a light on the matter.

Mrs Fiedler took a deep breath, apparently to continue her rant. Then Jupiter took the wind out of her sails with the interjection that he had only meant that broken legs during fishing were probably quite rare.



Behind him, he heard Aunt Mathilda chuckle. Her roommate had already opened her mouth to a long-winded explanation and now closed it again. Jupiter thought that looked funny and had to suppress a grin, especially when it reminded him of a carp.

“I don’t know how often this happens,” Mrs Fiedler replied sternly. “At least, it happened to me. It felt as if a whale had bitten, the rod hung so heavily in the water. Of course, I wanted my catch too. So I pulled as hard as I could.” She looked into the distance as if she was reliving the scene in her mind.

“And then?” Jupe asked carelessly.

“Then the fishing hook slipped off the rusted bike in the creek, and I slipped on the wet rock.”

“She landed on her back the same way I did,” Aunt Mathilda added. “Isn’t that strange? She broke her leg, and I broke my shoulder.”

“People are so different.” Jupiter simply could not resist this clever remark.

Mrs Fiedler seemed exhausted by the story. Anyway, she slipped a little deeper into her bed again and closed her eyes. But Jupiter had the distinct impression that she wanted to follow attentively what he and his aunt still had to talk about.

“And there’s one more thing—Pete is missing.” Jupiter had briefly considered whether he could expect the bad news to be delivered to his aunt. But then he had come to the conclusion that Aunt Mathilda would certainly be able to cope with it.

She raised her eyebrows. “Pete? Missing? I don’t think so. He’ll be at the seaside training until he beats you.” Aunt Mathilda gave him a friendly smile. Jupiter knew what she was hinting at. She was pleased that her otherwise completely non-athletic nephew regularly left the sports ace Pete Crenshaw behind in the water.

“But we still have school—until Thursday. And we haven’t seen him since Saturday.”

“Oh,” Aunt Mathilda just said.

Out of habit, Jupiter observed Mrs Fiedler’s reactions while talking to his aunt. During his last sentence he thought he noticed that one eyelid twitched.

The door opened and the pretty nurse with the snub nose came in. She wanted to measure the two patients’ blood pressure and pulse rate, and Jupiter took the opportunity to make a perfect exit.

On the way out, he took a look over the shoulder to Mrs Erna Fiedler. Over her plastered leg, she stared at the First Investigator with eyes wide open. And when she realized that he had seen it, she switched to a harmless expression in a flash.

Jupiter took the lift down to the ground floor and asked the doorman for the nearest phone booth. It was right next to the entrance. Jupiter dialled, and Aunt Mathilda answered.

“Don’t say anything, Aunt Mathilda, it’s me,” he said. “Just listen first. Pretend you’re talking to Uncle Titus.”

“And why, may I ask?” Aunt Mathilda’s voice sounded ungracious.

“It’s important,” Jupiter replied. “Please do me a favour and don’t repeat my question.”

“What question?” echoing Aunt Mathilda.

“The one I’m about to ask you. You must not repeat it!”

“Suit yourself,” it came out of the phone.

“Did you tell Mrs Fiedler about The Three Investigators and our detective work?”

“Of course. Everything. I’m so proud of you. Was that wrong?”

Jupe sighed. “No, no,” he said quickly. “But please do me one more favour. First, say out loud, ‘In the kitchen cupboard, top left-hand corner.’ And then you wait a moment and say ‘Goodbye, Titus’ to me. And then hang up.”

For a few moments, it remained silent on the line. “Are you serious?” asked Aunt Mathilda.

“I am completely serious,” replied Jupiter and repeated what his aunt was to say. “You’re so proud of us. So do me this favour.”

“All right, if it pleases you,” said Aunt Mathilda rather loudly. “In the kitchen cupboard, top left-hand corner... Goodbye, Titus.” And she put down the phone.

Thoughtfully, Jupiter marched past the doorman and out of the hospital. The sweltering heat of a Californian summer afternoon hit him in the face like a punch.

## **7. Message from the Kidnapper**

When Jupiter returned to the salvage yard, his eyes immediately fell on Uncle Titus. He had put his hands behind his back and marched restlessly up and down, just like Mr Crenshaw did a few hours earlier. As he approached, Jupiter noticed that the ends of his powerful moustache trembled, as often happens when Titus Jones is excited.

“Look what just came.” Uncle Titus had stopped at the living room table and pointed to the envelope. “It’s a very suspicious-looking letter.”

“What’s so suspicious about it?” Jupe asked as he looked at the envelope.

“The address has been written with a very scrawny handwriting,” replied Uncle Titus. “The sender had really tried hard to get letters in as awkward as possible.”

In the glaring sunlight, the First Investigator squints his eyes together to see better.

“Most of the time it is of no use trying to change handwriting,” the First Investigator interrupted him. “Graphologists can easily prove whether you have written or not written something. No matter how hard you try, the personal idiosyncrasies of writing remain intact.”

Jupiter then opened the envelope carefully and took out a white sheet of paper. On it were letters of unequal size stuck on it. He had to hold the paper away from himself to get out of the tangle of different kinds of newspaper letters.

“We have Pete,” Jupiter read slowly. “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.”

The First Investigator breathed audibly. His relieved expression seemed to irritate Uncle Titus.

“Why are you so happy?” Uncle Titus snapped.

“To rejoice is exaggerated,” replied Jupiter. “But at least now we know that Pete is alive. And if this is meant seriously with ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’, then we need not fear for his life because Pete’s never killed anyone before, has he?”

Reluctantly, Uncle Titus agreed. But Jupiter looked at the tip of his nose and wondered about so much cold-bloodedness. “We suspected Pete had been kidnapped anyway—by people we’ve dealt with in our previous cases. Probably some guys who got behind bars because of us, and now they’ve grabbed Pete.”

“Come on,” Uncle Titus said. “That’s bad enough! Your friend is being held captive in a dark basement somewhere, and you act like nothing is wrong.”

“He won’t stay in this basement for long. We don’t know where it is yet, but Bob, Kelly and I are gonna get him back.”

“Aha,” said Uncle Titus doubtingly. “You should still call Pete’s parents and the police.”

Jupe did not reply. Instead, he took the kidnappers’ letter and went over to Headquarters. Over the years, they had gathered all sorts of gadgets and equipment for their detective work. A small but efficient laboratory was part of it as well as telephone, fax and a personal computer where they stored their electronic archives.

Bob, who was in charge of research and records, had compiled relevant information from references to specialist criminal literature and reports from newspapers that might one day be important for their work. But what was more relevant now was their records of cases. The Three Investigators were proud of this collection and made sure that it was always up to date.

Jupe sat down at the computer and retrieve their archives on previous cases. When the case titles appeared on the screen, he leaned back and closed his eyes. In his own super memory, he called up all the criminal cases they had worked on in recent years. “A little exercise in concentration,” he grinned, while he chronologically and logically recalled in his mind the crimes of blackmailers, cheats, forgers, burglars and thieves. He shortlisted them out carefully. Then he checked them over again. Finally, he was satisfied that The Three Investigators had twelve cases in which the perpetrator or perpetrators had to serve a prison sentence.

“Twelve,” murmured the First Investigator. “It’s gonna be a lot of work. Now let’s see how good my memory really is.”

He extracted the description of those cases, numbered them, and barely a minute later had a printout of it in his hand. Jupiter photocopied

three more copies of the case descriptions. Then he picked up the phone and informed Cotta about the kidnappers' letter.

"So you did," said the inspector. "You had a good nose, as usual." Jupiter blushed a little and was glad that Cotta could not see that. "Do you have the list?" the inspector asked.

"Yes. There are twelve cases."

"Good. When can you be here with Bob?"

Jupiter looked at his watch. "At 4 pm. Okay?"

"Okay. Do you want to call Pete's parents or should I?"

The First Investigator thought for a moment. He thought about the possibility that he might get Pete's father on the phone. It would probably take a long time for him to believe that a letter had actually come from the kidnappers. With Cotta, it was different, although Mr Crenshaw didn't seem to think much of the police.

"Probably best if you do that," he suggested.

"The wording is: 'We have Pete. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.' And no signature?"

"None."

"Good. I'll break it to them gently. And don't forget to bring the letter."

Jupiter said goodbye and hung up. His eyes fell on the list of suspects and from there on the printout with the short descriptions.

Right in the first case, after exciting entanglements, they had unmasked a villain whom the judge sent to jail for several years for his unscrupulous business with narcotics. Jupiter felt a tingling in his stomach. If it was this gangster who had Pete in his grasp, then it was serious. Jupiter remembered only too well how he had dealt with people who did not bow to him immediately. On the other hand, he calmed down. He didn't have to think of the worst right away. Moreover, the verdict in this trial had been so harsh that the man was still in prison if he had not been released early.

From the drawer of the small desk he took a folder and gently placed the kidnappers' letter and the envelope inside. To save time, he decided not to put the letter under the microscope to search for fingerprints himself.

Pete had spent some time to ponder over this case, but finally, he dozed off. When he woke up, he felt better. He jumped up and checked to see if

the next food ration was there. But he found nothing. "Very good," he said grimly.

Obviously his kidnappers did not want to let him starve, so sooner or later another meal had to be delivered. That was the basis of his plan. First he got under the metal bed and tested how easy was it to slip out quickly. It went off without a hitch. Then he pushed the bed close to the door such that the door could be opened inward a short way before being blocked.

Then he took the blanket, folded it into an elongated shape and laid it on the floor in the opposite corner of his prison so that it was just barely lit by the lamp, albeit dimly. He took off his light-coloured T-shirt and crumpled it at one end of the blanket to make it look like him sleeping on the ground. He stepped back and looked critically at his work.

"That should be good enough," he whispered and cursed the kidnappers because they had removed everything from the hut. He groped his way back to the door and took another look at his work.

The kidnapper would notice that something was wrong when he bumped into the bed just after opening the door. Next thing he would see was the motionless bundle in the semi-darkness.

Now all he had to do was stay awake. Pete decided to strongly disagree with his biology teacher in high school the next time he would tell something about the so-called inner clock. He, Pete, certainly didn't have one. If he did, it had long since stopped. And he didn't even know when. He did not have the faintest idea what time of day it was.

He knew only that it could not be night, because through the walls of his dungeon, a lively concert of dozens of bird's throats penetrated barely audible.

The next few hours were torturously long. After doing some exercises, Pete marched up and down in the hut, always ten steps back and forth. Then he sat down on the bed and listened out while recalling every corner in and around Rocky Beach where someone could be held captive. Finally, he imagined what Jupiter and Bob and Kelly had done in the meantime to find his hiding place or to find out who had kidnapped him. At that thought, he was at a loss.

Again and again he racked his brain to see if he knew the voice of the man who had been waiting for him in the car. But in his memory, nothing moved.

When he noticed that the endless thinking threatened to make him sleepy again, Pete jumped up, did a few push-ups which got him going

again. He quietly counted. Every now and then, he stopped to listen outside, where the chirping and twittering seemed to gradually fade.

A short while later, he heard a noise outside. Immediately, the Second Investigator crawled under the bed.

At the same moment, a key turned in the lock.

## **8. A Case for a Psychologist**

This time the inspector did not receive them in his office as previously, but waited for them at the entrance of the Police Department.

With one hand in his pocket, he was chatting with the guard when Jupiter, Bob and Kelly entered the building. The First Investigator was sweating. In the summer heat, they had cycled right through the city.

“This is Kelly,” Jupiter introduced. “She’s Pete’s girlfriend and she wanted to come.”

Cotta nodded to her in a friendly manner. “Come along,” he asked her and went ahead. He guided them through bare, seemingly endless corridors and stairs. Bob was surprised, because from the outside, the building did not make such a spacious impression. Until now, they only knew the short way to the inspector’s office. It took the three of them some effort to keep up with Cotta’s long steps.

“Where are we going?” Jupiter finally asked. He hated not knowing what was going on. He also felt the drops of sweat running down his body. That didn’t exactly help to improve his mood.

“To the psychologist,” Cotta replied. “This case is for our police psychologist.”

“What does a police psychologist do anyway?” Bob whispered.

Jupiter looked surprised and replied: “Perhaps it is to narrow down our list of suspects.”

The first thing the First Investigator saw when he entered the office behind Cotta and Kelly was a poster of Sigmund Freud. The impressive photo showing the world-famous Austrian psychiatrist, beard and inquiring eyes hung larger-than-life on the wall behind the desk. He could not suppress a grin.

“Dr Ferguson,” the inspector said. In front of them stood a petite woman with an Afro-look in funny colourful clothes. The pile of files on her desk showed that Dr Ferguson had plenty to do. She had her visitors introduced, shook hands with everyone and invited them to a sitting area.

“So you’re private detectives,” she said politely.



“Yes,” Jupe affirmed, and he reached into this pocket, took out one of their business cards, and handed it to the psychologist. The card said:



Dr Ferguson studied the card and smiled. “I’ve learned quite a bit about you three from Inspector Cotta.” Then she turned to Kelly and said: “And you’re the girlfriend of the one who’s kidnapped.”

Jupiter caught the probing look the psychologist threw at Kelly’s sad expression, and was glad she wasn’t trying to comfort her with platitudes.

Dr Ferguson turned to Jupiter and said: “I understand you have a list of the cases you’ve been working on over the past few years.”

“Not all of them,” replied the First Investigator, pulling three pages from his pocket. “Only those that ended with prison sentences.”

“I have briefed Dr Ferguson,” Cotta intervened. Jupiter was surprised that the inspector was particularly formal. He seemed to have a lot of respect for the police psychologist. Now he turned to her. “We believe that Pete Crenshaw was kidnapped by people who want revenge on them—”

“—that they were convicted by these young people here and had to go to prison,” Dr Ferguson interrupted. “I know about it. There was a letter with the message: ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’”

Jupiter gave her and Cotta a copy of the letter and he also put the printout of the list of cases on the table. “There are twelve cases.”

Dr Ferguson took a pair of colourful reading glasses from her desk and immersed herself in the texts. Tense silence fell. Jupiter was curious as to what she would say about his brief descriptions. Bob thought about what Pete was doing at that moment. Kelly stared at the ground.

Now and then the psychologist wrote something on the paper. She has a thorough way of working, Jupiter thought, and that impressed him.

“I hope you do not have exaggerated expectations,” Dr Ferguson suddenly said. “I can’t possibly point to any of the cases and say: ‘Go to

this Mr Miles from case number 6, he has your friend Pete.”

“It’s obvious,” mumbled Bob.

“What I can say is: ‘With all due caution, at first glance, the perpetrators of five of these twelve cases are eliminated.’”

“Why?” Kelly wanted to know.

“For various reasons. To name them all would be going too far. The most important one is that these five are so directly concerned with enrichment that such an action simply does not suit them.”

“You think they’re too rough?” Bob asked.

“Quite so,” agreed Dr Ferguson. “If your suspicions are correct, the kidnapper is someone who is very vulnerable. He’s very sensitive. Most likely he feels wrongly punished. He suffers so much from this that he feels he must correct this injustice.”

“If he was that sensitive, then he would be thinking that he is not doing anything wrong,” Kelly objected and was visibly upset.

The police psychologist didn’t bat an eyelid. She took off her colourful glasses and looked at Kelly attentively. “I understand you well,” she said. “You’re worried about your friend. If I were in your place, I wouldn’t feel any different.” Then she tapped on Jupiter’s printout. “But if I am to help you, we must try to put aside our feelings towards the kidnappers. It’s about putting ourselves in their shoes. That does not mean in any way that we approve of what they have done.”

Dr Ferguson turned to Cotta. “These descriptions provide us a good start,” she said, and Jupiter grew a little in his armchair. “But of course, at first they contain nothing more than the mere course of events. I find too few clues as to the personality of the convicted. Therefore, I will need the court files on these seven remaining cases.”

“I’ll make sure you have them on your desk in the morning,” Cotta promised.

Dr Ferguson thanked him. “If we’re lucky, tomorrow afternoon, I might be able to name the three or four most likely candidates for such an act of revenge.”

She put her fingertips together. “How big and strong is Pete?”

“He has the figure and strength of a model athlete,” said the inspector.

“He’s the best athlete in high school,” Bob added.

“That means he probably wasn’t kidnapped by a single person, right?”

“We suspect so, too,” Jupiter said, and Cotta reported in brief on the conclusions Jupiter and Kelly had drawn from their findings in the parking

lot.

The psychologist listened and then gave them both an appreciative smile. “Not bad.” She turned to Cotta with a friendly sneering expression on her face. “In any case, the kidnapper most likely had one or maybe even more helpers. A classic lone gunman would therefore be out of the question.”

In seconds, Jupiter went through the seven cases. “We are actually always dealing with people who involve others in their criminal activities,” he said. The First Investigator listened to his own words and for once found that they sounded a bit stilted.

Bob seemed to agree, because he painfully pulled the corners of his mouth up and gave Jupe a gentle kick under the table.

“All right,” said Dr Ferguson and stood up. “The best part is, you’ll be back here in my office tomorrow afternoon at 4 pm.”

They said goodbye. Cotta marched out, and Jupiter was already standing in the doorway with Kelly when the psychologist thought of something else. “There’s one more thing I need to know,” she said. “In which these cases your friend Pete was particularly active in bringing the perpetrators to justice. I mean, so active that they might have noticed.”

“These are 2, 6 and 7,” replied Jupiter. “See you tomorrow.” He closed the door from the outside and imagined the stunned expression of the psychologist. But basically he was convinced that Pete had been chosen quite by chance.

Cotta stood with both hands in his trousers pockets in the corridor. “Well, what do you say?” he said. “Dr Ferguson is absolutely superb. With her, Pete is in the best hands.”

Jupiter wondered at the strange expression. After all, Pete was not in the hands of the psychologist, but in those of his captors.

## 9. The Duel

Pete realized how cold-blooded he was. Often, when things got exciting, he could clearly feel his own heartbeat, and his hands would get wet. This time everything was different. Wildly determined, he stared at the door. With his upper body naked, he lay flat on his stomach, the bed above him, and tried to breathe very quietly.

As expected, the door bumped against the frame of the bed, and for the first time in many hours, Pete looked out of his hiding place into natural brightness, but it was subdued. Outside it was twilight, so the eyes of the Second Investigator could quickly get used to the light conditions.

But the only thing he was interested in now were the two legs of the kidnapper, which were close enough to touch in front of him.

With a strong kick, the stranger bumped against the bed. “Hands up and back against the wall!” barked a bossy voice. A flashlight shone into the hut.

This was the moment, Pete had been waiting for. His hands shot forward and clawed around the two legs like vices. With all his strength he dragged the stranger down. What followed was a shrill scream and the muffled sound of a fall.

Pete shook off the bed and jumped on his feet. In front of him, half inside the hut and half outside, a figure lay on his back. He was dressed in black from head to toe. Pete couldn't see his face. A mask left two narrow slits only for the eyes. The figure groaned and seemed to writhe in pain. A wave of satisfaction flooded through Pete, but he thought the short fight had been won too soon.

“Hands up!” it hissed up to him. Pete squinting his eyes together. At waist level, he could see a dark, object pointing at him.

In a flash, an angry thought came through him. “You do not order me around any more.” With full force his foot kicked his opponent's hand and tore his arm back. That which looked like a gun sailed in a high arc and hit the inner wall of the hut.

Pete threw himself on the masked man with a header. But as quick as lightning, the man pulled both legs up to his chest and rammed his feet

into the Second Investigator's stomach and face. Pete cried out in pain and surprise. As if pulled by a rubber band, he bounced back and slammed on the Thermos that the masked man had left beside the door to the hut. Stars danced before Pete's eyes, and for a moment, he thought his backbone was broken.

The kick in the stomach had taken his breath away. When he could see clearly again, the man was scurrying away. And only a few blinks of an eye later, an engine howled.

Spotlights cut a path of glaring light into the forest. Still lying, now supported on his elbows, Pete saw how the light described a semi-circle at breakneck speed. He had the feeling that his blood stagnated when the light shone on the hut and then him. The engine roared in Pete's ears, and the two round eyes from which the beams of light came literally flying past him.

What was the man trying to do? Unwillingly Pete tore his hands in front of his face. But then tyres screeched. But it was the sound of the reverse gear that Pete recognized immediately. The shining eyes retreated.

The Second Investigator got up. The car had turned around and rushed past him. Pete tried to read the licence plate, but the driver switched off the lights. The rear licence plate was hardly recognizable, let alone decipherable. Stunned, he stared at the vehicle that soon disappeared behind the next group of trees.

"That was close!" he moaned. Without a second thought, he staggered over to the blanket, took his T-shirt and put it back on. It was getting cold.

The next moment, he went to the side of the wall where the gun had fallen and picked up the weapon that the masked man had lost in the fight with him. In the glow of the miner's lamp, he examined it and found that it was functional and loaded.

At the same time, a lightning bolt scattered the sky far away, and even before a soft roll of thunder sounded, Pete sensed an approaching cloudburst.

A few minutes later, a thunderstorm broke out in a way Pete hadn't experienced for a long time. Lightnings drew the boldest patterns into the night sky, thunderclaps made the forest floor shake and almost burst the eardrum. From pitch-dark cloud towers, which were brightly illuminated by the lightning, rain poured down on the earth as if it was from a huge barrel. And the racing wind, with its stormy whistling, its plaintive whimpering, gave a terrifying concert.

Pete didn't mind. On the contrary, he enjoyed it to the full. He stood at the door of the wooden hut that had been his prison just a moment ago, his arms crossed in front of his chest like a proud landlord, and sucked in the damp air with flared nostrils.

Pete imagined how he would tell Kelly, Jupe, and everyone at school and of course the reporters of his experiences. On the front pages of the Californian newspapers, his photo would shine with the story of the well-trained boy who had freed himself from the grip of his kidnapper by his own efforts.

Then what was that? A flash of lightning illuminated the forest, and between the trees in front of him Pete thought he saw a dark shadow outside the hut. He narrowed his eyes, but when the forest was once again bathed in glaring light, he was so dazzled that he could see nothing.

The shadow came threateningly closer. Again the sky became one big dome of light. Directly above the hut the rain poured so mightily that within a short time, streams had formed just outside the door, forming a confusing network of watercourses in the gently sloping terrain towards the trees. Banging, like whip lashes, the next wave of thunder rolled over him.

The next time he saw the shadow, it was only a few metres away. Unwillingly Pete took a step back into the hut and reached for the gun in his belt. Suddenly, a horrible noise sounded, a heart-breaking lamenting sound that mingled with the ebbing thunder and finally fought alone against the crackling of the water masses and the whistling of the storm. For a moment, Pete had the feeling that the blood in his veins was freezing.

In the reflection of the next flash of lightning, the Second Investigator was presented with a spooky figure. Pete bent down and looked carefully. It was a dog! On steep forelegs, he was only a few steps away from the hut. He had raised its muzzle up to the raging elements which now sang the painful song again.

Pete swallowed. He stuck the gun in his belt, got down on his knees and whistled before the next thunder rolled up as loud as it could.

## 10. The Secret of the Glass Ball

At noon the following day, Jupe visited Aunt Mathilda in hospital again. Actually, he would have preferred to go alone, but Uncle Titus could not be dissuaded from the idea that the patient would enjoy most when husband and nephew sat together at her bed.

Jupiter and his uncle got out of the old rickety truck. While walking to the entrance, Uncle Titus apparently didn't notice the amused people looking at his truck or he had decided to ignore their pettifogging impulses.

"This vehicle is roadworthy," he used to say at regular intervals, whether asked or not. "That is the only thing that is essential about a vehicle. Whether it looks beautiful, whether the paint is shiny and the electronics are all the rage—only fools are interested in that."

Aunt Mathilda wasn't feeling very well. Around her nose she was quite white and she complained of constant pain in her broken shoulder. She had hardly begun to talk when her roommate joined in.

Mrs Erna Fiedler loudly asked if Aunt Mathilda had seriously hoped that she could get well in that hospital. "That's really naive," it sounded from the pillows she had piled around her head. Jupiter thought that it looked like a protective wall against the evil world in general and against these allegedly completely incompetent doctors in particular.

"Oh, Erna," sighed Aunt Mathilda. Apparently she had heard her roommate's nagging often during the past four days.

Jupiter noticed a wrinkle between the bushy eyebrows of Uncle Titus. It became steeper and steeper, and Jupiter feared that his uncle would explode at any moment. As comfortable as Uncle Titus was normally, he could not stand it when Aunt Mathilda suffered.

"Can you stand up? Then let's go outside a little," he said with a side glance at Mrs Fiedler. "This will do you good."

Aunt Mathilda nodded and laboriously lifted herself up. When Jupiter passed Mrs Fiedler's bed, she made a sign to him that she wanted to speak to him. He nodded briefly and went outside.

They walked up and down the corridor and talked about events in the past days until Aunt Mathilda came to Pete's disappearance.

"Have you heard anything from him yet?" she asked anxiously.

"We are certain his life is not in danger." Jupiter told them about the anonymous letter and that with the help of a police psychologist, they were hoping to find out who the perpetrators were, particularly those who could consider kidnapping as a revenge action.

Uncle Titus smoothed the ends of his shiny black moustache and, with a smile, told his wife that this approach was reassuring.

"Shall we sit in the lounge?" Jupe suggested when they passed a small room with two sitting areas. "It is a little more comfortable here than in the draughty corridor." As soon as they sat down, he apologized briefly, and soon after that he stood in front of Erna Fiedler. This time her eyes shone mysteriously.

"You want to talk to me? What is it all about?" asked Jupiter excitedly.

Instead of answering, she bent down to the little table next to her bed. She pulled open the drawer and brought out a large glass ball that emitted a strange blue-silvery light.

"Are you very worried about Pete?" she asked. She seemed very nervous.

Jupiter knew no answer to this. What did Erna Fiedler have to do with Pete Crenshaw? He raised his shoulders, murmured something about the police and that Pete could take care of himself.

Mrs Fiedler sighed in relief. "Sit over there!" She pointed to a chair by the side of Aunt Mathilda's bed. "Close your eyes and listen carefully. I have seen in this ball where your friend Pete is."

Jupiter looked at Mrs Fiedler as if she came from another star. His mind was in a haze. Why should I believe in this? Why did she look so scared the first time I saw her? Maybe it wouldn't hurt to take a look at the magic with the glass ball after all?

"Really?" he finally said, trying hard to sound flabbergasted. "That would be great! That would be madness!"

Obediently he sat down on the chair and closed his eyes, but in such a way that he could observe Mrs Fiedler through a fine crack. She sat upright in her bed. Jupiter was again amazed at her agility, because her leg was still stretched upwards at a sharp angle. She had her eyes closed as well, with the mysterious glass ball rested on her palms. All of a sudden,



Mrs Fiedler opened her eyes but kept her gaze fixed on the ball. On her face lay something enraptured.

“I see—” she started, but that’s as far as she got.

The door opened noisily. The nice nurse, who already knew Jupiter, fluttered in with a note in her hand, and asked whether Mrs Fiedler would prefer to eat roast veal or lamb in the evening. Mrs Fiedler was irritated and said she didn’t really care.

The nurse cast an irritated glance at the patient and the bluish shimmering ball in her hands, made a cross on her note, looked at Jupiter with her mouth opened. But then she wordlessly closed the door behind her.

“I see—” Mrs Fiedler started again after a short pause for concentration, “I see forest.” She groaned audibly, as if the performance was causing her considerable effort. “I see a deer, and some strong, big animals.” She lowered her voice and almost whispered now. “I see their bloody antlers on the wall.”

Jupe shrank. Erna Fiedler’s evocative voice did not miss its effect on him. He hardly dared to breathe.

“And Pete? Where’s Pete? Did you see him?” he asked anxiously.

At first, she didn’t react at all. She crouched motionless in the middle of her pillows. “By the antlers,” she suddenly replied.

“He is in the house of a hunter,” mumbled Jupiter. “Is it true?” Through the slit in his eye, he watched her facial expressions. Now and then, her eyelids fluttered.

Suddenly he suspected that the woman was perhaps after a reward. Sooner or later, she might have calculated, there would certainly be a reward for clues in the kidnapping case. And so far, everything spoke for the fact that Erna Fiedler seriously believed that what happened elsewhere would become visible in the glass ball.

“In the house of a hunter,” echoed Mrs Fiedler. “I see wood... Lots of wood... A cabin... A cabin in the middle of the woods.”

“Do you see Pete?”

Erna Fiedler was panting as if she was about to climb a three thousand metre mountain. “Big boy,” she finally pushed out. “Strong, muscular... There! I see him in the cabin!”

“He’s a great athlete,” Jupiter agreed. But he did not forget for a second that Aunt Mathilda had told her roommate all about The Three Investigators.

What on earth was she up to? On the other hand, if she was right, it might make the search for Pete's kidnappers much easier.

Jupiter imagined himself standing under the poster of Sigmund Freud and explaining to Dr Ferguson that she had made all her efforts for nothing. For he had just learned from a clairvoyant that the perpetrator must be a hunter. So the police only had to check the list of suspects to see who that was. Immediately afterwards, he could see the soberly friendly face of the psychologist in front of him, with her funny colourful glasses, and hear her asking him when such famous detectives had resort to such methods.

Jupiter blushed. He called himself to order, pinched his arm hard once as a precaution so that he could return to the present, and blurted out the question that interested him most. "Mrs Fiedler," he said sternly. "Where is that hut?"

Mrs Fiedler didn't seem at all out of it. Only her left eyelid twitched a little. "I see the sea," she said again with her gloomy voice. "But only a tiny streak on the horizon, surmounted by skyscraper buildings."

She stopped moaning, cleared her throat and continued in a husky voice. "I see oranges, many oranges... I see mountain tops and forests... Forests beneath mountain tops."

Jupe scratched his head. Undoubtedly, the area Mrs Fiedler described here was the hilly region east of Los Angeles, with the huge fruit plantations in the valleys from which wooded mountains rose. If Mrs Fiedler's glass ball could not give a more precise location, it would take weeks or even months for the police to comb the whole area.

"Where is this exactly?" asked the First Investigator. But he immediately felt that it would be in vain. In fact, Mrs Fiedler seemed to have reached the end of her discourse.

"I see oranges," she repeated emphatically. "I see mountain tops and forests. Forests beneath mountain tops."

Mrs Fiedler gasped and stretched and for a brief moment, looked at the glass ball like an unknown object that had unexpectedly come into her possession. For a while she remained motionless, then she took a deep breath. With a jerk she pulled the drawer open and let her magic instrument disappear into it.

Jupiter came to her bed. Mrs Fiedler's face was clearly flushed. On her forehead was a film of sweat.

"That's all you can say?"

“Sorry.” She raised her hands. “But he is somewhere up there. Go and search.”

“I wish you a speedy recovery,” said Jupiter. “I must go.”

“Don’t tell your aunt. I don’t think she wants me to get involved.” Erna Fiedler spoke in a normal voice again.

Shortly afterwards, he opened the door to the lounge. Uncle Titus threw a searching glance at his nephew. “Been gone long,” he muttered. “Is something wrong with you?”

“Not really,” replied Jupiter. But he caught himself pinching his lip, as he always did when he was thinking hard. “I’m okay.”

## 11. Kelly's Discovery

Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis from Europe, seemed to look down proudly on Dr Ferguson as she placed a few files and some sheets of paper on the table. Cotta, Kelly, Jupiter and Bob were sitting in the cosy sitting area again.

The First Investigator had immediately noticed that Kelly was terribly nervous. Since they had taken their seats, she had already folded her arms twice, and then squeezed her fingers, making the joints crack.

Bob thought of the conversation he had had in the morning with Pete's mother. She had been very worried because Pete had now disappeared for the fourth day and the police still had no clue where he was being held and by whom. Inspector Cotta had to admit this in a telephone conversation the night before. But Bob imagined that Mrs Crenshaw had been much calmer at the end of his conversation with her.

"You have nothing to worry about," he had said, "Pete will return safely." And when she had asked how he knew this so well, he had simply said: "I just know. He'll be back tomorrow or the day after." Somehow his confidence seemed to have transferred to her, because when Mrs Crenshaw hung up, her voice stopped shaking.

What the psychologist had to tell them was by no means encouraging. "From this list itself, I've come to believe that seven of them are possible suspects in this case."

She straightened her glasses and looked up from her papers.

"However, after checking the court files, of these seven, five are still in prison because their sentences are correspondingly long."

"Maybe they were released early," Jupiter interjected.

Cotta bent forward. "They're not," he said. "I've already checked that."

"That leaves two," said the First Investigator. "What about them?"

"The first one... after he had served his sentence, he emigrated," Cotta continued. "As far as the authorities know, he never reappeared here in the US."

“And for the second person...” Dr Ferguson turned to Jupiter. “Unfortunately, he was seriously injured in a traffic accident a year ago. Since then, he’s been lying paralyzed in a nursing home, so we can also eliminate him as the kidnapper.”

“Oh, no!” Tears came to Kelly’s eyes. “This can’t be happening.” Bob gritted his teeth and put his arm around Kelly.

“This man in the nursing home may have given others the order to kidnap Pete.” Jupiter did not want to give up his last hope so quickly, but it was destroyed by Cotta.

“I called the nursing home. The man is so badly off that the doctors consider it completely impossible that he could have ordered such an action.” The inspector looked around.

“Of course, it is possible that one of the other five could have given such orders to accomplices from within the prison,” Dr Ferguson continued. “But, first of all, in the short time available, it would be hard to find out. And second, it’s not very likely... because if you want revenge, you want to experience it yourself.”

“You think someone who is still behind bars himself does not have much to do with a kidnapping that he is not a part of,” Jupiter said.

Dr Ferguson nodded. “Right. He wants to feel his superiority and let the one he wants to take revenge on feel it directly. But if he cannot participate in the kidnapping himself—” Shaking her head, she took off her glasses and laid them on the table. “I’m sorry, but we have to put up with it. We can’t get to the kidnappers that way.”

“We’ll just find him some other way.” Kelly jumped up. “We just have to find him,” she cried.

They said goodbye to the psychologist, who seemed depressed because she had not been able to help.

Cotta took the three to the exit. “We must be patient,” he said consolingly. “By the way, tomorrow’s papers will carry a story about Pete’s disappearance... with a photo of him. Maybe we’ll get some tips from the public.”

Jupe suspected something. “And is there a reward?”

The inspector raised his eyebrows. “Sometimes I really think you’re psychic. Our top boss has put up ten thousand dollars for anyone who can put us on his trail.”

Bob was staring at him. “Ten thousand dollars? That’s a lot of money.” He furrowed his brow. “Maybe it’ll get his chain-smoking

accomplice who was waiting at the parking lot to talk.”

Cotta shook hands with the three of them. “Perhaps. It’s probably not, because he’s made himself liable to prosecution. But he may be foolish enough to make insinuations about others.” He smiled. “You know yourself how stupid and vain some criminals could be.”

“Come on,” Kelly said, urging them to go to the bus station. “I have an idea.”

Jupiter looked at his watch. “Sorry, folks, but I have to meet Uncle Titus at the hospital. I’m pretty late as it is.” He turned to Kelly. “What is your idea?”

Kelly fought back. “It’s just a thought. I want to look something up on your computer again.”

“Okay. Keep me posted.” Jupiter got on the bus and waved goodbye to the two of them through the window pane.

Curiously Bob looked at Kelly curiously. “Come on. What do you want to look up?”

Instead of answering, Kelly pulled out the copy of the list Jupiter had got back from Dr Ferguson. The cases and suspects in question were clearly marked and annotated in the margin.

“We all suspect that Pete has been kidnapped by people who want to get back at him,” Kelly said. “Otherwise the anonymous letter with the message ‘an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth’ would have no meaning. So all twelve cases in Jupe’s list have been analyzed by Dr Ferguson and she systematically eliminated all of them. Perhaps Jupe have overlooked something.”

Bob was glad that Jupiter did not hear what Kelly had said. “You mean,” he said, “the kidnapper may be from another case—”

“Yes,” Kelly eagerly interrupted him. “But for some reason, Jupe left him out. I have a hunch why he missed it.”

Half an hour later, Bob and Kelly were sitting in front of the computer monitor in the trailer and retrieved the documentation of all the cases The Three Investigators had ever been involved in.

“Are you sure Jupe has covered all the cases?” Kelly asked. “Or could it be that he missed out on one?”

“Unlikely,” Bob waved. “Jupe rarely forgets such things.”

“Maybe the records here are incomplete or missed out something,” Kelly kept on drilling.

“Unlikely again. Our First Investigator constantly preaches that such documentation needs to have all the details in. I compile the records and he checks through them thoroughly, and adds in information, especially after the court cases. In any case, he always enjoyed this work.”

“All the better,” Kelly remarked. “So we can be pretty sure that Pete’s kidnapper would show up in these records.” She put an index finger to her nose. “One thing has been on my mind the whole time—the twelve cases that Jupe took out from the archives here were all involving perpetrators that had to go to prison.”

“Right,” Bob agreed. “Because there have been court cases in which they were convicted.”

“And that’s where the mistake could be,” said Kelly triumphantly and quickly typed in a few search commands.

“Where?” asked Bob at a loss.

“Very simple. Ever heard of acquittals?”

“Of course,” mumbled Bob. “I’m no novice, but I think you’re barking up the wrong tree.”

“Not necessarily,” Kelly countered.

“But why would anyone who’d been acquitted kidnap Pete? He wouldn’t have any motive. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a...” Bob broke off and stared silently at Kelly.

“Well, did you finally get the point?” hissed the girl. “You took a long time, and you are supposed to be familiar with this...”

Bob scratched his chin at length. “You are thinking of alleged offenders who were remanded in custody and later acquitted,” he said slowly. “When a person is remanded in custody, it means that they were detained in a prison before and during their trial. So even if they are eventually acquitted, they still have served some time in prison!”

“So strictly speaking, they should also be among Jupe’s cases on the list!” Kelly cried.

“Obviously, Jupe did not consider acquitted cases,” Bob said thoughtfully. “But off hand, I don’t recall that we had someone innocent that was remanded in custody.”

“Are you sure?” Kelly asked, putting on a rather sceptical face.

Excited, Bob jumped up and clasped the back of his chair. “Jupe would have remembered something like that right away. And I probably will too.”

“But as I see it, acquittals can also result from lack of evidence,” Kelly continued.

“Lack of evidence! That makes sense,” Bob said.

Kelly turned back to the screen. “Then what we’ve been thinking about now is quite simple. We’re looking for someone you guys busted, who was then remanded in custody and acquitted by the court—whatever the reasons for acquittal may be.”

“That’s possible,” Bob replied. “But there won’t be many of those.” He rubbed his chin again. “At least I don’t remember a case like that, if there are any.”

“We have no choice but to review the entire archives again. Agreed?”

Bob nodded, and they started looking at each case from the beginning. Kelly pulled the arrow straight down to the end of each case where Jupiter had noted what had happened to the perpetrators.

Bob took a deep breath. If they now search the records thoroughly and perhaps with a bit of luck, the name of the kidnapper would appear in the next few minutes—with all personal data, from address to telephone number.

They found what they were looking for in case number 14.

“Look there!” cried Kelly.

Bob read aloud: “Verdict for Matt Brady: Acquittal because the prosecution failed to establish the accused’s guilt beyond reasonable doubt.”

He pushed Kelly and pointed to a preceding passage in the text. “But before that, he had spent almost eight months behind bars! This could be our guy!”

“A perfect fit,” Kelly confirmed. “Don’t you remember him?”

“The name doesn’t ring a bell,” Bob replied. “Let’s see what that was all about.” He reached for the mouse to bring the beginning of Jupiter’s short description to the screen.

“Herman Spencer, business owner, and a distant relative of Uncle Titus, was blackmailed. He was to pay \$300,000, otherwise the public would learn certain embarrassing things about him.” Excitedly Bob drove through his blond mop of hair. “Of course, now I remember, but only on the case. Pete and Jupiter solved that on their own. It was that summer when my parents and I were visiting relatives in Texas. When I came back, it was all over. I never met this Brady guy.”



Kelly's index finger tapped the screen. "It's like something out of a storybook," she moaned.

Bob read the rest on the screen. "'The trail led to Charlie Ross, another Rocky Beach businessman. Ross confessed and incriminated his partner Matt Brady. Ross was released on \$200,000 bail and disappeared forever. The trial was only against Brady. Verdict: Acquittal' and so on."

"If that's not motive for revenge," mumbled Kelly, "then I don't know what is."

Bob agreed with her. "Unlike this Ross, who had enough money to bail himself out, Brady was rotting behind bars for eight months. Perhaps his business was ruined when he came out."

"Imagine that he was innocent after all," Kelly added. "Imagine if he had merely been the victim of a scheme by Ross and had nothing to do with blackmailing Spencer."

"Only he would know that," Bob said gloomily.

Kelly got up and immediately sat down again. "We still have to look at the other cases. It's possible that there are other similar cases like this."

Shortly afterwards the two were satisfied that there was no other such case in the archives. Kelly then scrolled back on the screen to case number 14.

"At the very end of the text are the dates," she said.

"Matt Brady, born 1942 in Dallas, Texas," read Bob. "When Jupe and Pete were investigating him, he lived in Los Angeles, Pacific Avenue."

Kelly rose again. "If our parking theory is indeed correct," she said stretched, "then the kidnapper had an accomplice. And if Matt Brady is our man, then who is this not very intelligent chain-smoker?"

"We'll find out," Bob replied, "when we get there." He already had the Los Angeles phone book in his hand and was searching the endless columns with his index finger.

"Brady, Matt!" he shouted. "He still lives on Pacific Avenue. I could call him to see if he's there."

"There's no way you should do that," Kelly objected. "Because then you either have to hang up the phone as soon as he answers, or you'll have to find some funny excuse. Either way, he might suspect something's up."

Bob made a grimace. Of course, Kelly was absolutely right. She was really clever, and next to her the actual detectives in this case looked pretty helpless.

## 12. Checking Out a Suspect

Kelly looked at her watch. "Seven thirty. I suggest that we pay Mr Brady a visit."

"When? Right now?"

"When else? If he is the kidnapper, I don't see why Pete has to sit in his basement one minute longer than necessary."

Bob nodded again. "With Jupe, there would be three of us," he said cautiously anyway.

"But we have no idea when he'll be back. Without him, there are still two of us," Kelly insisted. She threw her hair over her shoulders with an energetic swing and fished for a piece of paper. "We'll just leave him a note. Then he knows where we are. He can either follow or wait for us or —" Kelly faltered. "Or have him call the police if we're not back in time."

"What deadline do we set?" Bob had already got used to putting Kelly in charge.

"Till midnight," she decided and noted the time for Jupiter. "Where is the photocopier?"

"There in the corner." Absent-mindedly Bob pointed to the flat grey apparatus that had been part of their office equipment for quite some time. "What do you need it for?"

"Maybe Jupe won't come in here when he returns home from the city with his uncle."

Bob caught a somewhat condescending look.

"So we leave a copy of the message here and also to pin another copy to the front door of his house," Kelly continued.

"You think of everything," praised Bob.

Kelly's knuckle tapped three times gently against Bob's forehead. "Don't be angry with me, but you're thinking almost nothing. It all evens out."

An hour and a half later, the two of them were at Pacific Avenue in Los Angeles, four houses away from Matt Brady's address. It was a quiet,

almost elegant residential area with small front gardens facing the street. Wherever houses and trees exposed the view, they could see the sun, which was a glowing red ball of fire over the sea, heading for the horizon.

“Best you stay here,” Kelly suggested. “I’ll drop inconspicuously and see if Mr Brady really does live there.”

After hardly a minute, she was back, pretty excited. Bob also felt his heart beating faster. Maybe they were only a few metres away from Pete!

“There’s only one name on the sign—‘Matt Brady’,” Kelly said. “And one room already has its lights on.”

On the drive here, Bob had time to come up with a plan. “What about the entrances?”

“There is a gate by the road. About waist-deep. From there, a path leads to the front door.”

“The front door faces the street or the side?” Bob asked.

“On the side,” Kelly said impatiently. “Does it matter?”

“I just want to know what to expect,” Bob replied. “I think we could outwit him.”

“Sounds good,” Kelly replied slightly irritated. “And how do you do that, you great detective?”

“There’s a certain risk we have to take. I’m gonna check out the surroundings. There’s a good spot over there. There I can climb over the wall unseen. I’ll make a quick patrol around the house and then hide near the front door.”

“Great. And what do I do?”

“You give me a minute’s lead. If everything remains calm, you go and ring the bell at the front of the gate.”

“Then what?”

“Mr Brady would probably come to the door and see you standing in the street. You will shout to him that you want to speak to him. After that there are two possibilities—either he wants to get rid of you, in which case I’ll have to somehow try to get past him to the house before he closes the door.”

“Or he’ll come to me at the gate and you’ll slip into the house behind his back,” Kelly added.

“Correctly guessed.”

“And what do I tell him when he comes to me at the gate?”

“Very simple,” Bob said. “You say it’s about an important matter and whether you could discuss it in the house instead of on the street.”

Although she was visibly nervous now, Kelly smiled. “That’s a good plan. And if he doesn’t want to, I’ll just ask him if he hasn’t noticed that in the meantime someone has broken into his house.”

“Right. In this case, he has little choice but to go back in and look. Then you climb over the gate and follow him. If he slams the door in your face, I would be in there. I’ll find a way to open it for you.”

“All right.” Kelly squeezed her fingers again, making the joints crack.

“So...” Bob turned around.

“One more thing,” Kelly asked, holding him by his shirt. “When we’re in the house with Mr Brady, we should look for any clues that have anything to do with hunting.”

Bob knew right away what she was hinting at. On the trip to the police department, the First Investigator had told the two of his strange encounter with Aunt Mathilda’s hospital roommate.

“I know—the antlers that this strange lady claims to have seen in her strange instrument.” Bob was panting. “I’ll do it, although I find it ridiculous.”

“The main thing is that you do it. We don’t have to care where she got this information, do we?”

“All right. I promise.”

“How do we go about facing this Matt Brady in there, anyway?” Kelly asked.

“The best thing will be to use our surprise advantage,” replied Bob, who was glad that the initiative was finally back with him. “If necessary, we’ll tell him straight away that we know he kidnapped Pete.”

For a moment, Kelly seemed to lose her nerve. She lowered her head and said: “But what if this is all wrong? What if we missed something or Dr Ferguson was wrong?”

“We will soon know by his reaction. We’ll just have to watch him closely. If he has nothing to do with this, we will apologize and leave.” Bob made a grimace that was supposed to be funny, but it turned into a wry grin. “Mr Brady would be pretty mad at us. As long as nothing worse happens to him and to us, everyone is fine... except for Pete.”

Kelly swallowed and tightened. “We have to try.”

Now that the battle against his captor had been won, Pete felt tired. As he stood in the doorway of the hut and watched the storm gradually subside, he wondered whether he could afford to sleep.

He stroked the fur of the Wolfhound, which had finally joined him in the turmoil of the forces of nature, seeking protection.

Pete had named him 'Shadow' spontaneously, because he had first perceived him as a dark shadow between the trees. He was happy about his new friend, although the stench of the dog's wet fur was constantly rising into his nose. Shadow was a racy, high-legged, grey dog with a white muzzle.

"If that fellow comes back, maybe armed again, and finds me asleep here—of course you'd bark loudly and attack him, wouldn't you?" The Wolfhound set his ears on fire. "But how did you get here, Shadow? If I only knew..."

Thoughtfully, the Second Investigator shook his head. "You belong to my captor, right? He left you in the car, and when he tried to run away, you jumped out of the car. In all the excitement, your master didn't really get you back because he was so keen to leave." With the flat of his hand, Pete stroked the trusting dog gently on the head and the dog pushed himself closer to him.

In the meantime, at a considerable distance, a bright lightning flashed across the night-black sky. A mighty, long-lasting roll of thunder followed. It was still raining in torrents.

"Nevertheless, we will stay here and sleep." Pete struggled to come to a decision. "Would that guy come back here? He must think I'm long gone by now."

Shadow shook himself, wagged his tail and trotted to the corner where the lamp gave its dim light.

"And he won't look for you either. Of course he thinks you're roaming around somewhere." Pete stretched and yawned. "Come on, let's go to sleep. Tomorrow may be a long and stressful day. Who knows how long we'll have to walk through this forest before we meet someone?"

Pete closed the door and he prepared his camp in the hut which a few hours ago had been his prison. Shadow barked twice loudly and powerfully and settled majestically at the door guarding the entrance. Pete took a few deep breaths. He stretched out on his mattress, put the kidnapper's gun under the frame of the bed, folded his hands around his neck and said loudly: "One thing I don't understand... If this kidnapper is really your master, why do you put up with such a mean guy?"

The dog looked at Pete attentively.

The next morning, the sun was already above the tree tops when Pete woke up. He blinked into the unfamiliar brightness and did not know where he was at first. Then he remembered. He looked around. Shadow was still at the door, and let out a slight whimper.

He opened the door wide to let in more light. Shadow raced out.

“Hey, Shadow!” Pete watched at the door. “Where are you going? ... Oh, never mind, you’ll be back, won’t you?”

Then he turned back into the hut, and was startled. His eyes fell upwards on the wall. Above him, just below the ceiling, antlers protruded from the wall. Without knowing it, he had spent the last days together with the heads of dead animals high up on the walls. Disgusted, he looked at the hunting trophies. His disgust with the kidnapper grew.

Pete pushed the thought aside. He felt hungry and looked around for the meal the kidnapper had brought him that evening before. It was still there, and the coffee in the Thermos was still warm. He then sat down on the bed and ate his breakfast, but saved some food for the forthcoming walk.

He briefly recalled the nightmare that lay behind him. Where might his parents, his friends and the police look? Did they have any clues about the man who had ambushed him in his car and kidnapped him? Or were they still completely in the dark? His parents must have been very worried about him.

But what were the kidnapper’s plans? Was he planning to release Pete at some point? Then he would have risked being tracked down. But if the kidnapper didn’t want him released... then what?

Pete was determined to get back at the villain! But he had to get out of this place first!

A while later, Pete went outside the hut and looked around. There was no sign of Shadow. He formed both hands into a funnel and yelled: “Shaaaadooow! Shaaaadooow!”

When only a few birds fluttered up in fright, Pete put two fingers in his mouth and whistled.

Suddenly, something swept around the corner like lightning. It leapt two metres in front of him, flew through the air and hit Pete’s shoulder like a bullet. Apparently he fought with the dog, but was always careful not to irritate him too much. They got entangled on the damp earth without caring that they were soon covered with mud and tufts of grass.

“Come, Shadow, breakfast!” he said and offered his companion some bread, where he guzzled it up readily.

Soon, Pete and Shadow were ready to leave. The Second Investigator took a last look at the disgusting trophy collection on the wall and closed the door decisively.

According to the position of the sun, it was mid-morning, and he assumed that they were somewhere in the wooded area east of Los Angeles.

“Very simple,” he murmured, “if we keep going west, we’ll definitely get to the Pacific coast. And before that, there’s a coastal road.”

Pete stretched out his arms, admiring the forest scenery and sucking in the spicy air. Then he sent a cry of joy into the world. Shadow jumped up at him, wagging his tail and barking joyfully.

### **13. At the Suspect's House**

Bob watched from his hiding place at the side of the house as a young man at the garden gate spoke with Kelly. He had a queasy feeling in his stomach. That's not Mr Brady over there as he thought he'd be much older. Something must be wrong!

But there was no time to indulge in such thoughts. At the spur of the moment, he slipped into the house behind the young man's back.

He did not see anyone in the corridor or living room. With a few steps, he was at the window, through which he could continue to see outside. Kelly seemed to have convinced the man that it would be better to let her in.

Reluctantly, he opened the garden gate and walked in front of Kelly to the house. Brown hair parted in the middle fell over his shoulders. The face was soft and round, a ring adorned one nostril. Bob estimated the slim man was in his early twenties. Still, he seemed childish to him.

Bob made sure there was no one in the adjoining rooms. Footsteps could be heard coming from the corridor. When his gaze got stuck on a massive swivel chair, he had a crazy idea. He sat down on the chair and turned it with the high back to the door.

"All right," he heard a voice from the corridor. "So now you're in the house. But that doesn't change the fact that my father isn't here."

"You and I could have a little talk." Kelly sounded a little excited, but she seemed determined.

"About what?" The door to the living room opened.

"You must at least be able to tell me what you want from us!"

"There are a lot of very interesting topics we could talk about," Kelly replied quite loudly, not knowing where Bob was.

"Good afternoon, Mr Brady Junior." Bob swivelled the chair around with momentum and stopped directly behind young Brady.

Young Brady turned around on his heel and stared at Bob in horror. His face colour changed from red to white, his mouth opened and closed. He swallowed, but couldn't make a sound.



“Good afternoon,” Bob repeated. He got up and reached out to him. Hesitantly and cautiously Brady shook Bob’s hand, but pulled his hand back immediately. He is afraid, Bob concluded.

“His first name is John,” Kelly said in high spirits.

“Speaking of introductions,” Bob continued in the same tone of voice. “This is Kelly, and my name is Bob.”

John looked at her and suddenly he tightened up, “What’s this all about?”

Bob put his hands in his pockets and started to walk around him. “That’s a very understandable question,” he replied and scrutinized John. Physically, the gangly John was certainly inferior to Bob, but he was probably a reasonably good sprinter. As a precaution he took position between John and the living room door.

Kelly sat down on a chair at the dining table and started to make her joints crack again. Suddenly she had an idea. “While we’re talking and waiting for your father, we could afford a fag, don’t you think? Or is it illegal to smoke here?”

John made a grimace. The idea that they made themselves comfortable in his living room obviously didn’t appeal to him at all. “You can smoke all you want,” he said to Kelly. “But I want to know what’s going on.”

Kelly, whom Bob knew had never smoked, felt her pockets as if she was looking for her pack. “Forgot mine,” she moaned.

Bob knew exactly what Kelly was getting at. John Brady, the Milk-Face, might pull out a pack of those rare ‘Clint’ cigarettes they found in the parking lot, and Bob would then know that he had helped kidnap Pete Crenshaw. The Milk-Face would of course collapse and lead them into the basement, where Pete would fall around the neck of his liberators, weakened but otherwise safe and sound.

“I don’t smoke.” The voice of young Brady tore Bob out of his daydream. Kelly’s face reflected her own disappointment. “And if I don’t find out what you’re doing here, I’m calling the police.”

“I don’t think so,” Kelly said dryly. She looked at him defiantly. “What’s your father gonna think when he comes home and you call the police on him, of all people?”

Bob mustered John. He did not show a particular reaction. He threw his hair back and did not answer.

Kelly followed up. “Does the name Pete Crenshaw mean anything to you?” she asked bluntly. Bob grinned furtively. Kelly was firing at random

to see what happened.

John put his hands in his pockets. "Pete Crenshaw? Never heard of him. And even if I did, why do you care if I know Pete Crenshaw?"

Bob scratched his chin. John had no idea, he thought. He has no idea, but he wanted to hide it from them. Bob caught a desperate look from Kelly. In response, however, he only shrugged his shoulders at a loss. The conversation went very differently than he had imagined.

"When is your father coming back?" Bob heard himself ask.

"I already told her that," John pointed at Kelly. "He should have been here by now." He cleared his throat. "And when he's back, you'll be out in a big way. You can bet your life on it."

John's somewhat distorted face betrayed anticipation, but also fear. Nevertheless, Bob was furious at the tone in which the Milk-Face spoke to them. After all, they were not here for fun, but because they suspected John's father of having something to do with the kidnapping of their friend.

"You shouldn't open your mouth so wide," John growled back.

"He's absolutely right." The voice came from Bob's back, from one of the doors leading into the side rooms.

Bob turned around and the first thing he saw was a gun barrel aimed right at his head. The owner of the gun looked a lot like John Brady, but he was at least thirty years older. He too had long hair, but it was not brown, but light grey. His face had countless wrinkles, and on his nose sat rimless glasses with thick lenses.

Shocked, Bob looked into two cold eyes.

"Hands up!" commanded the man, and Bob and Kelly obediently stretched their arms to the ceiling. "What are you spying around here for?" barked Mr Brady. He was obviously annoyed, because without waiting for a reply he asked his son why he had let two strangers in.

"We're not spying, Mr Brady," Bob said, while John was still looking for an answer. "We are investigating the disappearance of one Pete Crenshaw." Bob thought that Jupe could not have formulated it better. The First Investigator attached great importance to professionalism.

"I've heard that name before, when I saw you trying to question my son." Mr Brady's eyes squinted into narrow slits. "But he has never heard the name, right, John?" The gun barrel swung a bit in the direction of Brady Junior.

“I already told them I don’t know him, Dad.” John was in a hurry to give the requested information.

## 14. A Plan Gets Out of Hand

“Sit over there!” The gun swung back to Bob’s head and from there to the sofa that stood under the wide window facing the street. “Both of you! And no foolish things. And don’t think I won’t shoot!”

Bob and Kelly settled on the sofa. Bob folded his hands at the back of his neck.

“And now I want to hear why you came here looking for this Pete Crenshaw,” announced Mr Brady. His eyes were very attentive, and the gun was constantly aimed at either Bob’s or Kelly’s head.

Bob had very mixed feelings. On the one hand, the older man did not behave like an innocent, so maybe they were correct with their suspicion. On the other hand, his aggressiveness did not bode well. Bob saw himself and Kelly already languishing in the same prison where Pete was held. His gaze flitted over to John, who was watching the scene from the side and apparently didn’t know what to make of the whole thing.

Kelly took the initiative. “Pete has disappeared without trace since last Saturday,” she said, “A friend of ours received an anonymous letter saying ‘an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth’. We suspect that Pete has been kidnapped.”

“Sorry for him,” Brady replied abruptly. “And what am I supposed to do with it? Or my son?”

“Your son has already explained that this name means nothing to him,” Bob replied. He ran his tongue over his lips and gathered all his courage. “We haven’t heard that from you.”

Brady’s cheek muscles ground. It looked as if he wanted to say something, but then he obviously changed his mind.

“By the way, Mr Brady,” Kelly said, “there’s no point in keeping us here. We are expected back by midnight at the latest. Our friends have your address and know we’re here.” Bob opened his eyes in horror and nudged Kelly, but in her eagerness to corner Brady, she could not be stopped. “If we’re not back in time, the police will show up here.”

For a few seconds everything remained silent. “So this is how it is,” growled Brady. “Go down to the laundry room.” The command for the son

sounded harsh. "Bring two clotheslines." John hesitated. "Come on, come on!" cried his father, and again he involuntarily waved the gun in the direction John was standing.

Junior shuffled away reluctantly.

"What are you up to?" Kelly asked and Bob thought he heard a slight tremor in her voice.

"I ask the questions, and no one else!" Behind the glasses, Brady's eyes sparkled. "Now I want to know what I'm supposed to do with Pete Crenshaw."

Kelly was not intimidated. "If I can get my hands down, I'll tell you," she promised. To Bob's surprise, Brady agreed. But when he wanted to take his hands down too, Brady immediately ordered him to stretch them back up again.

"We have compiled a list of people who might have had motive to take revenge on The Three Investigators."

Brady looked disgusted. "The Three Investigators? What kind of a child's play group is that?"

"They're very successful private investigators from Rocky Beach," Kelly continued unflinchingly. "There are a number of people who have ended up in prison as a result of their investigations."

Brady was panting. Outside, the steps of his son could be heard.

"You're one of them," Bob said.

The man's face distorted. John appeared in the doorway with the ropes in his hand.

"You throw a rope over to them now," Brady commanded. "And you," his gun aimed at Kelly. "You tie your friend's hands behind his back. Is that clear?"

John did what his father ordered him to do. He looked confused and frightened. Bob turned his back on Kelly and obediently put his hands together behind her. When Kelly was done, she was tied up by John. Nobody spoke a word the whole time.

"We're going on a little trip," Brady finally said. He turned to his son. "You go up to my bedroom. Bring down the two suitcases."

Again John left the room with sluggish steps.

Bob felt less fear than curiosity about what was to come. Kelly had made a huge mistake, it was obvious. If the police arrived after midnight, they would not find anyone now. But perhaps, Bob considered, Brady will take them to Pete.

Doubtfully, he looked at the man with the gun. Was he even the kidnapper? Or had they got in his way of something completely different and he just wanted to gain time? Up to now he hadn't said a word to indicate that he had anything to do with Pete's disappearance.

John had a hard time carrying the two suitcases down. He put them in front of his father with a groan. Then he stepped back and seemed to have thought about something, because he said softly, "I don't want to go."

"You do what I tell you!" was the sharp answer. "You're going." Scornfully Brady added: "When this is done, you can leave. Then I won't need you anymore."

Bob had to grit his teeth to control himself. He would have loved to go after this guy who treated his son so badly.

John stood there staring at his father. Then he threw his long hair back over his shoulders. The defiant gesture was deceptive. John obeyed. He felt sorry for Bob, and Bob regretted that he had given John the nickname Milk-Face. With this father, it must have been hard to grow up.

"John, you go ahead! Get the suitcases! And then you two—follow me!"

The gun swung from Bob to Kelly and back. John bent down after the two pieces of luggage. Slowly the little train set itself in motion. Through a narrow corridor, past the kitchen, they reached directly into the garage.

John turned on the light. Kelly and Bob stood in front of a spacious six-seater station wagon.

"Come on, get in!" Brady ordered, ripping open the door and shoving the barrel of the gun into Bob's back. "Like I said, no fooling around!"

Bob and Kelly exchanged quick glances and a silent nod of the head. They climbed onto the back seat.

"You drive," Brady said to his son and settled on the middle row of seats. He held the gun on his knees, and he sat at an angle so that he had Bob and Kelly in his sights at all times.

The garage door opened automatically. Outside it had become dark. Pacific Avenue lay quietly there, and a silver crescent smiled from the sky.

"So where to?" John sounded like a taxi driver asking his passenger where to go. Bob shook his head in disbelief. He had never experienced anything like it.

"Where to?" Brady barked back. "To Pasadena!"

## **15. Mrs Fiedler's Confession**

When Jupiter came home together with Uncle Titus, he immediately made his way to Headquarters. On the table was the note left by Kelly and Bob. Hastily he skimmed the message. Disappointed and unwilling, the First Investigator wrinkled his nose. He had never been able to stand arbitrary actions, and certainly not those that took place in his absence, almost behind his back. Apart from that, he couldn't see what they were hoping to find from Mr Brady who was acquitted. But the next moment, he recalled that Mr Brady had been in prison prior to the court case and his subsequent acquittal.

His flat hand slapped against his forehead. "Idiot!" he moaned. "I totally missed out this case!"

He turned on the computer and called up the archives. There it was in black and white. Jupe whistled softly through his teeth. Dr Ferguson would not think highly of him if she learned that he had provided her with insufficient records. Not to mention Cotta.

Jupiter took a look at his watch. It was half past eight. Following Bob and Kelly to Los Angeles was pointless. They might even be on their way back if they can't get to Brady. Then they would drive past each other unsuspectingly. Or if Brady was actually the kidnapper and the two of them just got him to confess. Maybe they had already freed Pete...

With if's and maybe's, he won't get anywhere, Jupiter pondered. He felt uncomfortable with the idea of having to sit and wait until midnight—until the two of them came back or calmly called to say they had solved the case and freed Pete. But possibly...

Jupiter realized that he couldn't tear himself away from his thoughts. Bob and Kelly might be in a dangerous situation. He had good memories of Brady. When Pete and he got on his trail in the blackmail case, the man had seemed quite confident. Later he had experienced it again, as the accused in the courtroom. There he had hardly said anything and avoided looking at the audience. He had seemed bitter, and when he opened his mouth he sounded very gruff and angry. Brady was clearly furious with his partner, who had accused him unjustly.

Jupe pinched his lip. Was Matt Brady the man who took revenge on Pete? “Maybe,” he muttered, “maybe so.” His eyes fell on the answering machine. [flashing light]

Almost mechanically he pressed the ‘Rewind’ and then the ‘Play’ button.

“Hello, Jupe,” a familiar voice came from the tape. “It’s Aunt Mathilda. Too bad you’re not here. I am reasonably well, although my shoulder still hurts quite a bit. Sorry to bother you after just a few hours with me. But my roommate, you know, Erna, says that she has a very important message for you. She won’t tell me. She said you could call her anytime, even late at night. She can hardly sleep in this hospital anyway.” The voice of Mrs Fiedler was heard from the background, shouting something in between. Probably some more flattery about doctors, Jupiter thought.

What should he do? Would he want to chat with Mrs Fiedler about the latest findings from her mysterious orb? Moreover, he had not forgotten that horrified look on Mrs Fiedler’s face when he had left the hospital room on his first visit. Jupiter had pondered a few times about the reason for Mrs Fiedler’s striking reaction, but had not found a plausible explanation.

He pulled up the telephone, put his feet on the small desk and dialled the number of the hospital.

“It’s Jupiter Jones,” he said a little formally when the man at hospital connected him with the patient in room 304. “You wanted to talk to me?”

“Yes, I wanted that.” Mrs Fiedler’s voice trembled. “It’s urgent... and it’s extremely important.”

“It’s about Pete, I suppose,” Jupiter said. “Does your glass ball know where he is now?” That also sounded a bit cheeky, he thought.

Through the phone there was a long rustle and snuffle. But she’s really nervous, thought Jupiter, when suddenly she cried: “Forget about the glass ball!”

The First Investigator almost dropped the phone in surprise. “So what is it then?”

“Forget about that stupid glass ball.” Again there was a salvo of noises, from which Jupiter concluded that Mrs Erna Fiedler had great difficulty in keeping her composure. He imagined how she sat in her bed, straight as a candle, her plastered leg stretched steeply upwards.



“I’m very worried,” continued Mrs Fiedler. “From what I’ve heard from your aunt about you, I have to assume that—” She fell silent. Jupiter heard her breathing heavily.

Startled, he got attentive. What did this woman know? Why was it so hard for her to speak?

“What do you want to say, Mrs Fiedler?”

“I want to say... I mean, I’m afraid—” Erna Fiedler stressed every single word, “—that your friend Pete has been kidnapped by my brother-in-law.”

Jupe swallowed. To be on the safe side, he pinched his left earlobe to see if that was not an imagination. “Your brother-in-law?” he asked. “What makes you think of that?”

“Because... because it all fits together so neatly,” Mrs Fiedler stammered.

Jupiter tightened up. He squinted his eyes together. “Does your brother-in-law happen to be named Matt Brady?” There was only a faint hissing on the line. “Are you still there?” Jupiter cried.

“Yes,” it finally came hesitantly.

“Is he the Matt Brady that lives at Pacific Avenue?” Jupiter asked.

“How do you know that?” Mrs Fiedler asked.

“It doesn’t matter now,” he hastily replied. “I have to take care of Bob and Kelly. They’re with him... in his house.”

“Your friend and Pete’s friend, isn’t it?” moaned Mrs. Fiedler. “Oh, goodness!”

“Do you think your brother-in-law will harm them if he has them in his power?” There was pounding in Jupiter’s temples. Maybe he underestimated this whole case after all. He suddenly thought, maybe Kelly and Bob have to pay for his recklessness.

“I hope not. But—but he’s unpredictable.”

Jupiter forced himself to rest. Something had to be done immediately. He could not wait until midnight. But first a few things had to be cleared up with Mrs Fiedler. “Why do you think Pete is in that cabin?”

“It’s ideal for this kind of thing.”

“And where exactly is it?”

“That’s just it,” whined Mrs Fiedler. “I don’t know. I never cared about it. Somewhere in this vast, deserted forest area in the northeast. Matt told me about it, but I never listened. Only he knows the way there.”

“You don’t like him, do you?” Jupiter asked.

“I—” She hesitated again. “I can’t stand him. He... he’s horrible. But I feel sorry for him too.”

“That thing with the glass ball, you just did that to indirectly put us on Pete’s trail, didn’t you? And at the same time you didn’t want to betray your brother-in-law,” Jupiter deduced.

Erna Fiedler did not answer. Jupiter interpreted her silence as consent. “You believe that your brother-in-law is Pete’s kidnapper because he hinted that he would take revenge for the months he was in prison, right?”

“So it is.” She sounded contrite.

At the thought of the danger in which Bob and Kelly were apparently hovering, it ran hot and cold down his back after all. “Most likely, your brother-in-law had an accomplice when he kidnapped Pete. Do you have any idea who that could be?”

“Of course,” replied Mrs Fiedler. “Only his son could do that. The fool would jump out the window if his father told him to.”

Jupiter had heard enough. He thanked Mrs Fiedler and called Cotta immediately. Fortunately, the inspector was sitting at his desk in the police department even at this late hour.

“It’s getting serious,” said the First Investigator. “Pete’s kidnapper’s name is Matt Brady and he lives at Pacific Avenue in Los Angeles. Kelly and Bob are with him.”

The inspector reacted immediately. “Where are you now?”

“At our Headquarters.”

“Good. I’ll be with you in five minutes. We’re going there together.”

## 16. Cotta Intervenes

As Jupiter registered, it took hardly four minutes for the police inspector to arrive. He had told Uncle Titus and had just got out the entrance to the salvage yard when the police car with the siren sounded on the roof arrived. Jupiter got into the back seat.

“This is Jupiter Jones,” Cotta introduced the First Investigator. “And our man at the wheel is Sergeant Phil Meyer.” The sergeant, like Cotta, was in civilian clothes. He turned halfway to Jupiter, and smiled. The next moment, the police car shot away.

“I have informed my colleagues in Los Angeles by radio,” the inspector reported. “They are sending a patrol car to Pacific Avenue to wait for us there.” He looked at his watch. “But they won’t do anything until we get there. We have just under half an hour. Tell me what you know.”

Jupiter reported. When he admitted that he had overlooked Matt Brady and his prison record when shortlisting the twelve cases. The inspector comfortingly put a hand on his arm and said that something like this could still happen to the best policeman after thirty years of professional experience.

Just before they turned into Pacific Avenue, the sergeant took the siren off the roof. Slowly the car glided through the dark, deserted street, past a police car, whose two occupants Cotta immediately made contact by radio. They rolled past Brady’s house.

Jupiter took a look at the façade. “All dark,” he said.

“We’ll check it out,” Cotta said. “You know, Jupiter, that I’m not allowed to take you with me. It’s best if you just stay here in the car.”

“Okay,” Jupiter obeyed.

Cotta and the sergeant got out, signalled to their two colleagues, and the four approached the front door.

All four drew their weapons. Cotta crossed the gate and disappeared, Meyer followed him. Long agonizingly long minutes went by in which nothing happened. Finally, little by little, lights came on all over the house.

Soon after, the sergeant came out and rang the neighbour's doorbell. Jupiter saw the door open, a fat man appeared and spoke with Meyer.

Cotta went back to the police car and got in. "He's gone. No one's in the house, not even in the basement. The cupboards in the master bedroom are completely cleared out. One room is occupied, there are still clothes hanging. There is no disorder anywhere. It all looks like a perfectly normal departure. More precisely, it was a planned escape."

Jupe nodded anxiously. "And he's probably got Bob and Kelly."

"Suppose Brady wanted to leave the country anyway," the inspector began, "and he had planned to detain Pete for a certain period... But when Bob and Kelly showed up at his place tonight, it upset his plans and forced him to act."

"It could have been that way," Jupiter said.

Cotta was about to say something when the sergeant returned and got behind the wheel. He turned to Cotta and Jupiter.

"Brady lives here with his son John. He keeps out of everything and is considered an oddity. He used to be a successful businessman. Neighbours say he's changed a lot since he was in prison. His wife moved out two years ago. John is generally considered a weakling. Brady himself is often not around. What exactly he does and what he lives on, people do not know. He drives a six-seater station wagon, a pretty old dark red Chrysler." He paused. "And yes, he only left a good quarter of an hour ago."

Jupiter bit his lips and Cotta cursed softly. Sergeant Meyer then called the police department to do a check on the licence plate of the car.

Cotta turned to Jupiter. "By the way, what exactly did this Mrs Fiedler say when you asked her about the alleged accomplice?"

"She said that only his son could do that. 'The fool would jump out the window if his father told him to.'"

"Hmm." Cotta put his index finger to the tip of his nose. "In this house, I saw two family photos, apparently from better family days. The people on it are probably Mr Brady, his wife—and two sons."

"Two?" Jupiter was surprised. "That means Mrs Fiedler must not necessarily have meant this John when she spoke of the fool."

Jupiter looked at his watch. It was now after 10 pm, but he remembered that Mrs Fiedler had told him that he could call her late in the evening. "May I use the phone?" he asked Cotta. He nodded, and very soon Jupiter was speaking to Erna Fiedler.

“Sorry to disturb you so late,” began the First Investigator. “But it’s very important that we know who you meant by Matt Brady’s son who might have helped him kidnap Pete.”

“Who I meant by that? Well, the older one, of course. Jeremiah,” it came out of the receiver in a firm voice. Mrs Fiedler seemed to get a good confession.

“So not John?”

“John? Never. His father doesn’t think much of him. And vice versa. No one can figure John out.”

“But he lives with his father.”

“Just because he has nowhere to move to. He’s been away before, but he came back. If anyone was involved, it was Jeremiah. He has such a beautiful name for a birdbrain.”

“And where does he live?”

“In Pasadena. Just outside. I’ll give you his address.”

## 17. It's Over

On the short drive from Los Angeles to Pasadena, Bob had the feeling that something unforeseen would happen. There was tension in the car even though nobody spoke a word. Twice he tried to start a conversation, but each time Brady gruffly asked him to shut up.

John at the wheel was stubbornly silent. He stared straight ahead and seemed to concentrate completely on the late evening traffic.

Every once in a while, when Brady let his two prisoners out of his sight, Bob was nudged by Kelly, who then winked at him cheerfully. Bob sat shoulder to shoulder with her and had the impression that she was secretly struggling to get rid of her shackles. Once, Brady had looked at her very suspiciously.

Bob hoped that Brady would not check the ropes when they get out. Brady seemed nervous. He slid back and forth a lot, kept looking in the rear-view mirror as if he feared being followed, and looked at his watch often.

They left downtown Pasadena. Apparently John knew exactly where to go, because Mr Brady had never given a more precise destination than the name of the city. In the eastern suburbs, Bob noticed that John's driving style was becoming more and more hesitant. He also coughed more often and threw his mop of hair backwards.

When they had left the last suburb behind them, John stopped at a traffic light that had switched to green and was given a rude warning by his father not to fall asleep. A little later, they turned into a long narrow street, which was only lined with a few houses. Some cars were parked on the side of the road.

John pulled over and stopped. They've reached their destination, Bob thought and he nudged Kelly.

Bob could see how he pulled out the ignition key and put it in his left trousers pocket in a flash. Then Bob's eyes fell on the house they were parked in front of. The occupants were obviously still awake, because there were lights from several windows on the ground floor.

“It’s over, Dad,” John said without turning to his father. “I’m not going any further.”

For a few breaths, there was complete silence in the car. Bob was amazed about John, who suddenly spoke with such determination, but his father did not react at all. Within seconds, Bob understood that Brady had not expected this.

“I am not going any further,” John repeated. “You can do whatever you want, I’m staying right here. I don’t want to see Jerry. I don’t want to be drawn into your dark schemes either. You keep hiding them from me all the time anyway, so leave me alone now. And if you really have something to do with the disappearance of this Pete Crenshaw, then you can fix it on your own. I have nothing to do with it, and I have no intention of changing it.” He paused, but only to take a deep breath. His father sat behind him, completely motionless. Bob and Kelly didn’t move either.

“And as for those two back there,” John continued, “I will not allow them to be locked up anywhere by you and my brother. I suppose you want to leave, so do it now. You can walk the remaining two hundred metres to Jerry’s house.” Again, there was silence.

“You’re going to drive there now,” said Mr Brady. His voice sounded very husky.

“No, I won’t do that,” John replied. He turned to his father and looked him in the face. “I’m not afraid of you anymore. It’s all over now, Dad.” He pointed to the lighted windows. “I didn’t stop at this spot for nothing. There are still people awake. They’d be out here in a few seconds.”

“So you stand against me... against your own father,” said Mr Brady, pointing his thumb at Bob and Kelly. “Who was innocently imprisoned by those wise guys and lost everything.”

John started screaming. In two minutes, he shouted out everything that had accumulated inside him. After that, Bob and Kelly knew that Mr Brady was by no means innocent of blackmailing Mr Spencer.

“I know that in reality your partner, Charlie Ross, staged the whole story,” John concluded. “But you kept silent. What’s more, you were even hoping to get a share of the \$300,000.”

“How do you know that?” Brady seemed completely flabbergasted.

“From Charlie,” John replied. “Imagine that I have investigated the truth of your eternal sermons about your innocence and how much you have been wronged. Before he went abroad, Charlie Ross personally told me what arrangements were made between you two.”

For the first time, John let go of the steering wheel, which he had been clutching desperately until then. "I'm not afraid of your gun either, Dad. I'm not one of those animals you like to shoot."

Mr Brady was falling apart. The gun was still on his knees. With a jerk, Kelly brought out her hands. She reached forward and snatched the gun away from Brady.

He reacted late and gave up when he realized how quickly and determined Kelly was keeping the gun out of his reach.

Bob bent forward so that Kelly could get a better grip on his restraints.

"I always knew you were no good," Brady said. He sounded tired and weary. "Your brother Jeremiah would never do such a thing. He understands me."

"That he always agrees with you and does everything you ask of him does not mean that he understands you better than I do! His desperation was unmistakable."

Without a word, Mr Brady got out. He leaned inside the car once more. "Your brother and I, we just need a few more hours," he said to John. "Then you will never hear from us again. We're going far away. It's all planned."

"I'm not going to do anything," John replied.

Brady turned to Bob and Kelly. "As of last night, your friend is free again. He... he has..." Instead of filling up the sentence, Brady just made a throwing hand movement and slammed the door. He walked around the car and groaned and took out the two suitcases. Then he shuffled away with small steps on the side walk.

Bob and Kelly sat there frozen. They could feel John struggling to hold his own. Eventually Mr Brady had become just a small dot standing in the light of a street lamp.

At that moment, the almost lifeless nocturnal scene turned into a hellish spectacle. Headlights flared up, engines howled, other small dots jumped from all directions towards the man under the street lamp. Almost at the same time, the doors of the Chrysler were ripped open. A gun was pointed at John's head.

"Everybody out," someone yelled, "Quick, quick!" Strong arms grabbed Bob and Kelly and dragged them outside before they knew what was going on. The next thing they saw was Jupe running towards them from across the street.



Bob first fell around Kelly's neck and then the First Investigator's. "Pete is free too," he stammered, "since yesterday."

Then he turned to the cop who was behind John. In the meantime, he was leaning against the Chrysler with his arms and legs spread and was searched for weapons by two other policemen.

"Be good to him," Bob said. "He hasn't done anything wrong."

Shortly thereafter, all the police officers as well as Jupiter, Bob and Kelly had gathered at Jeremiah Brady's house. Mr Brady and his son John had already been put into a police car and Jerry had just been led out of the house. Cotta walked behind him. When he saw Bob and Kelly, he approached them and shook their hands heartily. "Congratulations," he said succinctly, as usual.

"Pete is free again!" cried Jupiter, Bob and Kelly as if from one mouth.

"That's good news," Cotta replied and let Bob inform him briefly.

"Maybe he's back home by now," Jupiter added, but the radiant Kelly said that Pete would probably have had a very long way to go.

Cotta pulled something out of his pocket and held it out to them. In the light of the street lamp, it shone yellow. "His cigarette pack," said the inspector. "Jeremiah Brady smokes 'Clint'."

## 18. A Companion for Jupiter

The happy ending of the case was celebrated the next day at the Crenshaws.

Pete, who had lost two kilos during the very moderate diet in the wooden hut and even more so during the subsequent journey through the woods down to the coast road, received Jupiter, Bob and Kelly at the front door laughing happily. On the street stood his MG, which the police had discovered in Jeremiah Brady's garage.

In the living room, his parents were waiting for the guests. They expressed their thanks to all those who have helped, especially Kelly and Bob had helped capture their son's kidnapper. Most of all, of course, they were proud of Pete himself, who had freed himself from the kidnapper's claws, as the excited Mrs Crenshaw expressed herself.

Next to the coffee table some newspapers were piled up. As in Pete's daydream, the front page brought the story of his kidnap, with photos. Pete had to listen to a lot of teasing about how the flattering his photos were.

It took a long time for them to recall and told each other everything that had happened in the last days. When Bob and Kelly finally reported what they had experienced between the Brady father and son, the exuberance gave way to a rather thoughtful mood.

"What's gonna happen to this John?" Mr Crenshaw wanted to know.

"I don't think he will be punished," replied Jupe. "Even though he went along with it at first, but he ended up protecting Kelly and Bob."

Bob agreed with him. "I could imagine that once he tells the whole story, they'll probably let him go."

Mrs Crenshaw said that the father-son bonding must be terrible. And then she added that she was thinking about paying a visit to Mrs Fiedler in the hospital the next day. "After all, she did a lot to make the whole thing go smoothly," she said.

"And besides that, you've always wanted to meet someone who claims to be able to read a crystal ball," Mr Crenshaw revealed with a wink.

Pete clapped his hands. "I brought something from the forest, by the way!" he shouted. "Something very special—that you will all be very

happy about.”

He disappeared and returned after half a minute. At his side walked majestically, with his tongue panting and his tail raised—Shadow!

“May I introduce... Shadow!” said Pete. “He was my companion up there.”

“Golly,” Jupe was astonished and immediately tapped into his legendary memory, particularly everything important about the dog breeds found in North America. “Irish Wolfhound. Narrow skull, very high legs, all colours conceivable, formerly trained for hunting. A great dog.”

“I mean, you should take him.” Pete wistfully stroked Shadow over his head. “We can’t keep him here. Out there with you in the salvage yard, that’s where it’d be perfect.”

“Did he run into you in the woods?” Kelly wondered. It almost sounded a little jealous.

“He did,” Pete said. “Maybe he even belonged to Brady. He certainly won’t need him in the near future. But I don’t really want to know.”